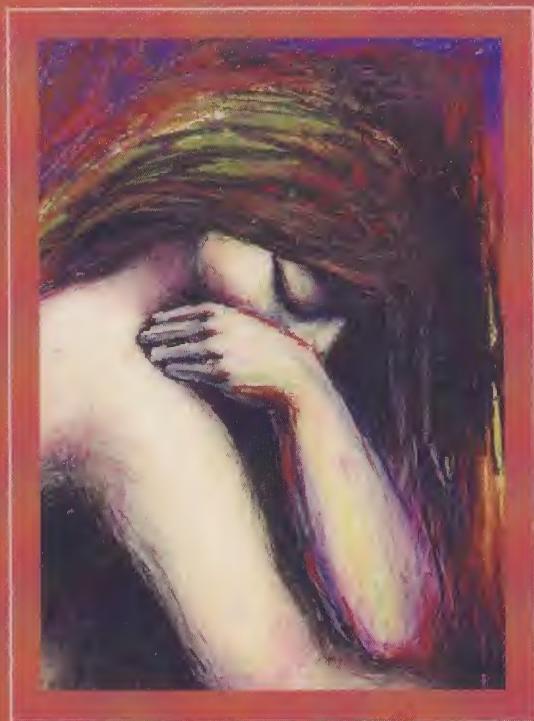


**BECAUSE I AM A FOREIGNER**

*Migrant Women in Cyprus Speak out*



by

*Beryl-Adolphs Nalowa Esembe*

**BECAUSE I AM A FOREIGNER**  
*Migrant Women in Cyprus Speak out*



by  
*Beryl-Adolphs Nalowa Esembe*

edited by  
*Joanne Elmadjian*

DEDICATED TO:

Women who have migrated  
Women who are migrating  
Women who will migrate

© ISBN 9963-8992-0 X

Printed by R.P.M. Lithographica Ltd

Nicosia 2005

## CONTENTS

---

<u>Acknowledgments</u>	vii
<u>Preface</u>	ix
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1–16</b>
The purpose of the book	1
Because I am a foreigner	2
Sources of information	3
Why do women migrate?	5
The system and the migrant woman	7
Discrimination based on class and colour	15
<b>MIGRANT WOMEN SPEAK OUT</b>	<b>17–75</b>
Experiences of domestic workers	17
Experiences of trafficked women in the sex industry	35
Experiences of female refugees	54
Experiences of migrant wives	63
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	<b>77–81</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I thank God all mighty for life, courage, strength and wisdom.

Sometimes I get depressed from the narration of a very sad experience and feel discouraged. During these times, I can only rely on my inner strength, which comes from my connection with the Divine, and the prayerful support from a group of migrant women from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nicosia; women from over 17 different countries of the world. I owe deep appreciation to the women who took time to fill the questionnaires and narrate their personal experiences and allowed me to include them in this publication. They gave me a lot of courage to go on with my work. I appreciate their trust when telling me their stories, knowing that I may not be able to lift a finger to change their immediate situation.

I owe much to KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism, an NGO of which I am member of the Coordinating and Steering Committees, for making this work public even though the views presented herein are not theirs.

Special appreciation goes to Doros Michael whose encouragement and guidance added taste and class to the book.

The AFRO community gave me the moral support I needed. Sometimes they led me to some of the victims.

## PREFACE

No woman wants to leave a place of comfort. When a woman is pushed out of her home, there are many unanswered questions that linger in her mind. There is the fear of the unknown. What will happen to my family? What will happen to me? What will I do if things do not work out well?

There is fear of not being accepted in the community and fear of facing isolation and scorn. Ignorance is not bliss at all times. There is the fear of being ignorant about the lifestyle, beliefs and practices of the people you will be living with. But all these put together gives the woman the courage to face the world.

Push-out factors are different for different women. When you read their experiences, please try to see the push out factor of the particular woman and realise that she really had to leave her home. Then with that in mind, empathize with the situation in which she finds herself. See how she reacts to the situation and ask yourself how you would have reacted had it been you. Bear in mind, they are real experiences!



## INTRODUCTION

### THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

There are many different theories of how the world came into existence. But I believe in the creation of the world by an Almighty Being.

When I read about the intentions of the Creator of the universe, I found out that we are far away from what He intended the world to be. Instead of a place of harmony, we have a world of discord. In place of love and peace, we have violence and wars. What really hurts is that the aggressor is so admired, even if sometimes the admiration is his own.

The world is full of oppression, exploitation and abuse of power. In all walks of life, the mistreatment of the weak by the strong is present. Most people see this in a bigger picture. But, it is happening in families, in our homes, with our children at school, in hospitals, on our streets. It is to this level that my research has been addressed.

My intention is to make public and explicit some of the means by which exploitation of this kind operates. My hope is that this book will help any female reader who is living in such oppressive conditions to be able to identify it and achieve clarity in waters meddled by cynical ‘pragmatists’.

It requires sensitisation, support and courage. Some courage and support can be drawn from this book, but sensitisation is what you will get the most.

Many studies and researches have been carried out, but the results pass over the heads of the participants. On the contrary, this book is

intended to get into the hands of the participants and others in similar circumstances so that they can believe their experiences are being studied singly, rather than generally, as presented in research/study reports.

After reading this book, the reader will be able to recognise exploitation and oppression in whichever form it comes, which is why the experiences are analysed in detail.

By the end, it will be clear that there is indeed some kind of conflict that exists between the migrant and society. This conflict may be psychologically embedded or even physically seen, so there are suggestions to the migrant woman to deal with this in a very peaceful way.

## **BECAUSE I AM A FOREIGNER**

The book you are holding in your hands is an analytic narration of experiences of women who are foreigners in some Mediterranean Islands and in particular Cyprus.

Arriving at the title, *Because I am a Foreigner – Migrant Women in Cyprus Speak Out*, was a difficult task. With so many other attractive alternatives, I had to read the entire book more times than I care to remember. But when '*Because I am a foreigner*' came to mind, I knew it was the right one.

You are about to start reading the ordeals faced by women in foreign lands and finding out how they survived (some unfortunately did not), and how they moved on.

In these narrations, the tricks of exploiters are also exposed and clearly analysed. The weakness of the exploited is shown, and also it

will be worthwhile to note that the women got exploited because they trusted whoever turned out to be the 'monster'. There is a clear picture of betrayal.

While the women I interviewed narrated their experiences, I recorded and listened and when I went back to listen to what I had recorded, I realised that there could be other explanations for their experiences, but there was one explanation common to all "Because I am a foreigner".

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

This book follows the completion of four research studies in which I am very proud to have taken part.

1. The research done by the Youth Group of KISA on the Integration of Young Migrants into the Cypriot Society (2002) which was funded by the Youth for Europe Programme.
2. The Refugee Profiling Research carried out by KISA and supported by the UNHCR, where I was the research co-ordinator (2002 - 2003).
3. The research on the trafficking of women, carried out by KISA and sponsored by John Hopkins University – I was in the team to look for and interview 'Trafficked Women'. This meant that we had to first establish the fact that the person was trafficked before asking permission to speak with them. It was a difficult task.
4. The fourth was a series of meetings organised by the UNHCR for Refugees to meet with the different officials of different Ministries in the Republic. I helped in the coordination and presentation of the problems of refugee women.

This is not a presentation of reports of the above-mentioned exercises, but a look at the very outstanding cases on an individual level. The book presents a narration and analysis of real experiences of Migrant Woman.

In the best way possible, in the following pages, I aspire to portray:

- How the Migrant Woman thinks, and the way in which she tells the experience that has helped to create in her mind, an image of the society.
- How the Migrant Woman feels about the situation and society.

Following the above, comes the big question: 'What could be done to make the situation better?'

In a very literary way I am painting the picture of the Cypriot society, looking at it through the eyes of Migrant Women.

In this essay, I have grouped the women in the following categories:

- a) Domestic Workers
- b) Sex Industry
- c) Women Married to Cypriots
- d) The Refugee Woman

It should, however, be noted that I have opted not to describe the methodology used because it is of no interest to the reader.

## WHY DO WOMEN MIGRATE?

During my encounters with these women I realised that there were diverse reasons for their migration. I decided to group them as follows:

### ECONOMIC

There has been a very high demand for labour in recent years in Cyprus. Statistics show that there are approximately 50,000 foreign workers in Cyprus. 12,000 of them are domestic workers most of whom are women. Women have come to this beautiful island for the primary reason of being domestic workers. A few work in construction companies for lower wages than men, even lower than the salaries of Cypriot women, who are also discriminated (in terms of salary) on the basis of gender. There are also women working in the sex industry. I must mention that it was difficult for me to get a number of women in this category as nobody wanted to tell me. However, I managed to get some to talk to me, sometimes by taking on a job as a hairdresser and made some clients from the cabarets. I met those who deliberately told me their experiences expressing the thought and the feeling that it was a 'normal' way to live, because they do not have access to, nor do they know any other way.

As much as these workers need the money and migrate for economic reasons, Cypriot society also needs their services. This explains why in the year 2004 there were approximately 40,000 foreign workers (Ombudswoman's Report of 2004), and in a space of one year (2005), statistics show that the number has increased to 50,000. It is a symbiotic relationship.

These women do the jobs that the nationals do not want to do for certain reason. Regardless of the qualifications the foreign woman has, she will be pigeon-holed just as an economic migrant and forced to take on inferior employment, - Teachers have become carpenters. Doctors have become cleaners in the clinics.

In the past, Cypriots had also migrated for the same reasons, looking for a country where they could make much more money than they would if they lived here. This is confirmed by the thousands who lived and still live in Britain, Australia, South Africa, Nigeria, the Arab countries etc. For this reason it is wrong to treat a migrant worker as inferior.

#### **POLITICAL / SOCIAL**

Many countries of the world are torn by natural disasters, resulting in destroyed landscapes and terrain, fertile grounds are covered with infertile rubble, and countries that depend solely on subsistence agriculture have suddenly become destitute. Ethiopia provided food for European countries during the Second World War, yet today the pictures used in showing the extent of poverty of some nations are taken from Ethiopia. How sad!

When citizens of such countries migrate and come to Cyprus, the only way they can get legal documents of identification is seeking political asylum. This also goes for citizens of war-torn countries, and countries with dictatorships and no freedom of speech or expression. Such people are forced to migrate because they are persecuted religiously, socially, politically or otherwise.

It is a known fact that this was the same situation in the early 1970's in Cyprus when people fled and went to faraway countries to seek shelter and start up a new life for themselves. They were asylum seekers, some became recognised refugees. Some have made these countries their permanent homes.

Seeking asylum is the right of every individual/citizen of any country. Most of the recognised refugees are here for political reasons.

There are some women who became refugees under the law of family reunification. I considered them as having come for social reasons – meeting their husbands. However, I did not include their experiences in this book.

For the purpose of this book, I want to make clear the situation of foreign women married to Cypriot men. Most of them lived with their husbands abroad and then migrated to Cyprus with them. They also face problems of integration. Even though they have the necessary documents as Cypriots, employment is not readily available to them, and they always need more than two guarantors for very small loans.

I also considered women who are black or Asian, but have one Cypriot parent, and migrated to Cyprus for naturalisation. The reason for considering this particular group of women is because they are effectively treated socially as non-Cypriots.

#### **THE SYSTEM AND THE MIGRANT WOMAN**

Before narrating and analysing the experiences of the women, let us take a close look at the model set in place for people of the respective categories.

#### **DOMESTIC WORKERS**

The women in this category suffer very serious violation of their employment and human rights. This is mainly due to the fact that most of them reside and work in the residency of their employer, hence creating a relationship of total dependency. (The narrations show exactly how their rights are violated).

This, in turn, has given room for all sorts of abuses (as narrated in the section on personal experiences) and exploitation.

A few years ago there has been the introduction of the 'release paper' – a document given to the domestic worker who has come to an agreement with her employer to be released from the contract that bound them both. From the date of receipt of the release paper the

domestic worker is given a month to find another employer after which she is considered an illegal 'alien', and then deported when caught. Most of the time the police finds them with the help of their former employer, (who surely gains something in the eyes of the police).

The question here is, 'How do the powers that be expect this woman who has had very little social contact (for those who are lucky to have Sunday off), or no social contact at all (for those who were not told that Sunday was a free day) to find an employer in one month?

Before the introduction of the release paper, a complaint against the employer was equal to deportation. Up until now, foreign workers who return to their home countries either by deportation or because their contract period is over, do not have their social security funds sent to them.

When I asked a social insurance worker why it was so, he explained to me that some countries do not have social security structures to facilitate the transfer of such funds. It is very easy to guess which countries are in such a list! But the point is, social security is an assurance of pension and domestic workers make this contribution very faithfully. Not giving it to them is equal to robbing them of their hope of having a pension. So the negative results of being a domestic worker in Cyprus follow the person to her old age!

Presently the system does not allow the renewal of work visas for domestic workers. So while the woman can try to change her employer, and with more difficulties her employment, she has to return home after the years on her visa have elapsed. The new employer continues with the period left by the former employer.

This law is implemented both to women who came in before the law was adopted, and to those who came in after the adoption, which according to the domestic workers is "unfair". "When I came in 2002 I was told by my employers that if I did my job well and cause no troubles, they will get my visa extended. But now they are saying that

it is impossible because the law has changed. This is not fair to me because I think I should be considered and treated by the terms of the law according to which I was employed" said Melisa from the Philippines, a qualified dental assistant now working as a domestic worker.

"Those who came in before the adoption of the law should have their contracts renewed and then told about the new system; these people just want us to go" said Misha from Ethiopia.

The employers of these women are not informed about changes like these, so they are very ill prepared to face the situation. Marie from Congo had just returned from her vacation. Her employer thought it wise to get her permit renewed so that her faithful domestic worker could continue her work. At the Immigration Office, the employer was told that Marie cannot have her work permit renewed and has to leave the country. Despite all the attempts of the employer to stop this unprepared return home, the Immigration officers arrested Marie and put her in the next available flight to Congo via Dubai, on the same day. It is very embarrassing for employers like this and more so for the domestic worker.

Although some women (like Marie) have been arrested when the employers go for renewal of contracts and deported like criminals, some have had their permits renewed. The law holds for some and does not hold for others! A few weeks after Marie was deported, I met Mimie from Asia. During the interview she mentioned the fear of being deported because her visa had only one month's validity and she also knew about Marie's ordeal. Then she added "but my employer knows someone who can help us to get the visa extended. Her visa was extended for another four years!

This system will result in an increase in illegal migrants. Most of them know the difficulty in finding employment within a period of a month, so when they leave their employers, they prefer to stay illegally than face the fear of possible deportation after a month of not finding a new employer.

Some of them mentioned that it was easier to live illegally and work illegally as well, than be bound to an employer on whom they depend totally. According to some, it was impossible to find an employer in that stipulated time. So after weighing the pros and cons, they decided to run away and be illegal, or obtain status as an asylum seeker and get employment elsewhere.

The fact that the run-away illegal alien domestic worker still gets to find work, and sustain herself, as difficult as it is, means that the society still has a need for such workers.

The presence of domestic workers is of huge financial benefit to the economy. The minimum amount of money paid for each one as Social Security is CYP 50 per month. This amount multiplied by the number of domestic workers standing presently at 12,000 is CYP 60,000.00. This implies that there is an approximate income of CYP 60,000.00 going to the Social Security Fund coffers per month. The per annum income is CYP 720,000. That is a good income

### THE SEX INDUSTRY

There is a different employment model for artistes - not the same as other migrant workers. In the sex industry the employment permit is given for six months and renewal of contract is granted only after the return of the artiste to her country of origin and then returned to Cyprus for a further six month period.

If in any case the sex worker is not satisfied with the employer and/or the employment she has been forced to take, there is nothing she can do about it because change of employer is forbidden. The only place she is headed for is home.

Not only is the change of employer forbidden, the change of employment is also disallowed. So a sex worker trafficked or not into her profession, remains a sex worker.

If a complaint ever gets to the Ministry of Interior from a sex worker, then the case is sent to the Immigration Department for investigation. Most of the time women are deported without an investigation being completed with the reason being given that her six months period of stay has expired as the Immigration Law allows. It should be noted that the Immigration Officer can prolong the period of his investigation and hence make room for deportation, but it is impossible to get the visa of the sex worker extended so that the employer could be sanctioned.

Some of the law enforcement officers make the situation even more frustrating for women who manage to escape and go to them for protection. Tania who was waiting to be attended to at the police station says: "While I was with the police, a very young Moldovian girl arrived, saying she had come from another city in Cyprus. She was crying and asking for help to get her 19 year old sister out of the cabaret so that she could return home. The Moldovian woman was told that she could go home, but her sister could not. Her sister had been raped by six men, and had not been able to get out of the shock. She had stopped talking and was numb and was terrified about everything around her. Despite all these, nobody would help her come out".\*

The above-mentioned points are all to the benefit of the employer and the employment agent. Unfortunately there is no implementation of any law in Cyprus in favour of women who no longer want to work as artistes, and yet have the legal permission to live in the country.

Their passports and visas are kept by their 'pimps', so when the worker feels dissatisfied and tries to make a case out of it, she is not only beaten up, but threatened with deportation without payment of wages. This kind of framework does nothing but to render the

\* This case appears in '*The Cabaret Artistes in Cyprus*', published by The Protection Project (sponsored by the John Hopkins University and the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies), page 39, paragraph 3.

employee vulnerable to exploitation, makes legal procedures inaccessible to the employee, and gives more opportunities for traffickers and employment agents to bring in more women, making it easier for the pimps to play 'gods' to these women.

### **WOMEN MARRIED TO CYPRIOTS (Mixed Marriages)**

The wife of a Cypriot man is considered a permanent resident. Beyond this, no other rights are mentioned, that is for example, employment rights, residency rights in case of divorce and rights in relation to the children.

The foreign wife is entitled to file in an application for Cypriot citizenship after three years of marriage and the acceptance of the application is at the discretion of the Minister of Interior. Some women who have filed in applications have had various uncertain replies; some say that they need to be married for five years, some say eight: the answer depends on which officer they meet and what mood he's in.

The presence of a framework like this one, which is not very clear, promotes behaviour that renders the foreign woman totally dependent on their Cypriot spouse: hence the countless cases of domestic violence, infidelity and in extreme cases, incest (having sex with his wife's children from a previous marriage) under the threat of deportation. Natasha (not her real name) got married to a Cypriot man and brought in two teenage daughters from a previous marriage. Their stepfather decided to have sex with them in turns. He would tell them "If you tell anyone about us having sex, I will not allow your mother to have the Cypriot passport and you will be deported back to Russia". It was a school teacher who noticed that her student had some evident problems and successfully made her to talk. With the intervention of the Welfare Department, they are free from this man today.

There is a complete lack of support systems for the children of mixed marriages in relation to their social needs, education and their

bicultural identity. There is discrimination even in the process of registering them in public schools.

Julieta, a child from a mixed marriage (African and Cypriot) got enrolled in one of the schools in her neighbourhood. One day her mother, an African, received a phone call asking her to bring her daughter to school. Upon arrival, she was told that there was a mistake somewhere and there is no space for her daughter in the school. Julieta was later re-registered when someone else (her elder half sister, who is white) took her to the same school and insisted that she must be registered because she lives in the neighbourhood.

### **THE REFUGEE FEMALE**

In the report titled *The Situation of Refugees in Cyprus from a Refugee Perspective* published by the UNHCR, October 2004, is written: "The Cyprus Refugee Law affords various rights to refugees varying from personal documents to the right to work" (page 10, paragraph 1). The problem is that refugees are often treated as foreign workers on contract in Cyprus and the fact that the law affords to them employment rights equal to that of Cypriots is not always taken into consideration.

According to the Refugee Profiling Research the majority of recognised refugees wish to be relocated to other countries. This is because the system provides little or no integration programmes for refugees in relation to employment. Refugee women with very small children who manage to find employment cannot take on these jobs because their salaries cannot pay the overpriced fees for day-care centres. There are no vocational courses offered to help them get access to a very discriminating labour market. There is shortage of programmes to help them keep in touch with their own culture and also transmit it to Cypriots. Being a refugee is like a stigma, even worse than being an asylum seeker.

## DISCRIMINATION BASED ON CLASS AND COLOUR

The ideas brought out by the women I interviewed is that the stratification of people in Cyprus is not only socio-economic, but also defined by ethnic origin colour and religion, with the Cypriots at the top class.

### MATERIALISTIC

According to these migrant women, this social stratification, characterized amongst other things by materialism, is one that has restricted class mobility.

Materialism and status go hand in hand in Cyprus. People who cluster together are people of about the same income. It may be interesting to know that two women became friends because they had the same kind of car.

They all agree that class mobility is restricted, and very difficult, but not impossible. For example, the poor man who successfully sends his son to the school of medicine will definitely succeed to move a generation of his family to a higher stratum. But this is long term mobility. They all said that it is more difficult, almost impossible, for upward class mobility to be achieved by foreign women for the main reason that they are not given opportunities for career and skill development.

The society lacks structures that support the development and promotion of skills, and these women feel alienated from the part of society that can give them support. For example, I talked with two women who are painters, one from the Ukraine and the other from Iran. The lady from Iran had more than a hundred pieces of her work and she approached some people to exhibit her work. She asked for a partnership to pay them commission if they would organise an exhibition for her. The response was very discouraging. "We think it

will be difficult for people to come to your exhibition because you are from Iran and you are not famous." She proposed to sell her paintings to them and they said they will call her later but never did. Repeatedly she went there and nothing was done, not even a word of advice to encourage her. This lady mentioned that she visited three different organisations and the response was more or less the same.

The woman from Ukraine has a different story ...

Slim, tall and long-necked – would generally be described as a good figure. She met up with another painter who liked her work and introduced her to a friend of his who is supposed to be wealthy and would do the kind of promotion needed by painters. They had a couple of meetings and talked about strategies for organising an art exhibition. In a couple of weeks they became 'lovers'. Days and weeks passed by, and when she mentioned the paintings, he became upset, and said he needed a woman to stay home and be a woman. Whatever that means! After a series of arguments, he stopped visiting her and when she called him, the recorded voice in the phone said: 'The number you have called is no longer in service. Thank you'

She got the point.

### EXPLOITATIVE AND XENOPHOBIC

According to my interviewees, the Cypriot society is xenophobic. They could not help her because she was from Iran.

According to the Ukrainian, the society is full with men and women who are out there to exploit vulnerable individuals. She feels she was sexually exploited. When I talked with other women, they narrated their own experiences and came up with the same words: 'We are exploited ... working much for less than they do and they fear foreigners. They think we are all here to get their money'.

Some characteristics of foreign women: they are mostly found in the lowest level of this society. They are characterised by humble

clothing, they are the pedestrians and the bus users or use the old fashioned cars. They meet with their friends only on Sundays.

This may make you laugh: A doctor (British Cypriot) invited her most loved professor in medical school to spend his holiday with her in Cyprus. This professor is Indian and dark skinned. They went out for dinner to a restaurant in which she was well known. The waitress approached her table and said "Good afternoon. You are dining with your gardener today."

'She is not my gardener, she is a professor.'

Why do you think that this waitress, who supposedly was acquainted with the MD due to regular visits to the restaurant, assumed that the visitor was a gardener? She was not white!

This also shows that in the mind of the Cypriot waitress, gardening is one of the jobs fixed for coloured persons.

These migrant women all agree that those who are coloured are often prejudged and placed in positions of humble occupations. One of them from Tanzania, working in an offshore bank, met her colleague in the lift on her third day of work. 'Good morning', said her colleague. Without waiting for the reply she added 'the old cleaner resigned? Are you the new one?'

The lady from Tanzania was startled. Her uncle actually holds shares, many shares in this bank and she was there to help in finding out why the branch in Cyprus was not doing well. Just because she was not white nor does she have the Cypriot skin colour, she was mistaken for the 'new cleaner'.

Cyprus has suffered its share of upheavals, occupation by foreign powers and wars. Yet the people are not automatically defensive or hostile. There is calm and quiet. In other words, it is a seemingly peaceful place. There is a very low crime rate. The people have a reputation for friendliness, although their friendship has a much defined limit.

## MIGRANT WOMEN SPEAK OUT

### EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

#### BLANDINA

"When he held the gun to my head and told me to take off my pants, I knew that in a very short time I would no longer be a virgin. I thought for a short while ... maybe I should just let him kill me so that I die a virgin. On the other hand, the fear of having a gun pointed at me and the pain of the gun pressed against my head made me confused."

Blandina comes from a middle class family in Zimbabwe. The family became very poor during the reign of Mugabe. She has never mentioned how many brothers or sisters she has, but she mentioned that she was nineteen. When Max visited Zimbabwe, she could communicate with him because she had learned how to write and speak simple, but correct English. She could use the computer, receive and send e-mails. Her family had welcomed Max with the killing of a goat and they ate together. As a 'favour' to her family, Max promised to bring Blandina to Cyprus as a domestic worker. This actually worked, because Blandina came and lived and worked with Max.

Yet it was Blandina who had the gun pointed to her head.

One day Max called Blandina, after his wife had gone to work. He slotted a videocassette into his video player and Blandina was shocked to her core. There on the screen were images of her naked, taking a shower and getting dressed. Her "kolos" (butt) was mostly

the main focus. In shock and surprise she asked her master what all that was about.

"Blandina, I am not going to hurt you if you cooperate. Just undress and let us have sex."

"I am a virgin Mastro," she said. "Please do not disvirgin me. It will be a very bad thing for me. I may not have a husband, please do not do this" she pleaded.

Well telling the one who wants to rape you that you are a virgin is not really the best thing to say. Most of them want virgins! This just goes to tell us that Blandina was a naive village girl who found herself in a situation that she had never imagined.

"You can see for yourself that I do not need a house maid. Why do you think I brought you here? I love you", he lied.

Well they argued for some time and when Blandina started screaming, he pulled out the rifle. Blandina then said, 'you can shoot me, but I am not going to take off my pants'.

Max on the other hand would have a lot of problems explaining her death. He cleverly thought that rape could be denied, so still with the gun in one hand, he roughly pulled off her pants and raped her.

Then the threat follows ... "if you tell anyone, you will not believe what I will do to you!"

Dear reader, he raped her many times, sometimes beating her and then locking her in her room.

Blandina did not know what to do but before deciding to commit suicide she reported this issue to Mrs Max. The conversation was recorded. In her e-mail to me, Blandina states, "I did not want her to divorce her husband. I just pleaded with her to make him stop. I was already 'disvirgined'. All I needed was to be left in my pain. And also I did not want to get pregnant. If madam supported me and told her husband to stop, I would not have tried to kill myself".

From that we can see that "madam" did not try to stop her husband. In the recorded conversation her response was "Blandina, do not worry, if you get pregnant, I will send you back to Africa and take complete care of you and the baby. We cannot go to the hospital because they will ask who the father of the baby is" (ie, if she is pregnant.)

This response broke her heart. She decided to go and get some medication to kill herself. Then she was spotted by Fid - one of the Max's employees working in his shop. He leaves the house at 6:45 am and comes back only when the shop closes. But on this day he was sent home by his master to get a certain document from off the table and then he saw Blandina taking the tablets.

Fid did not report to his boss, but called his local church pastor who came and took care of the situation.

They reported the case to KISA and when Max was notified about the report he immediately got her deported.

In looking into her deportation it was realised that all the documents needed for a domestic worker to be deported were not done. She was illegally deported. This clearly shows that someone was 'bought' by Max.

Let us take some time to analyse this case.

## **TRAFFICKED**

I would like to give a simplified definition of the word 'trafficking': *The transportation of a person from one geographical location to another, by the use of force, deceit, coercion, or making the person unconscious, or by any other means for the purpose of exploitation and self-interest. Exploitation includes slavery, sexual exploitation, and labour exploitation different from slavery (internationally accepted definition).*

With this definition, which is very correct, we can rightly accuse Max of trafficking Blandina. He deceived her into believing that she was going to be a housemaid, when in real terms he was going to use her for sex. A form of coercion was used. She was also forced to do what she did not sign in her contract.

#### A RACIST ACT

It is a pity to see how a social problem can easily become a racist problem. Max could have extra marital sex if he so desired because sex is freely available in Cyprus. Remember the question he asked her? "Why do you think I brought you here?" He travelled to Africa where he could get a black woman. Maybe at this point I should tell you that Cypriot men have asked me if it is true that the black woman's vagina is generally tighter. This is what Max had in mind when he decided to go to Africa. It may be wise to add here that Max had got domestic workers from Asia, the Philippines and China. They all left before the expiry date on their contracts. I was doing my enquiries to find out why they all left. I was told by a contact person that one of the girls said 'she was tired of having sex with him'. That is why I believe that an African woman was the only kind of woman missing from his list.

In trying to get the opinion of some people about the behaviour of such employers, many people think it is a behavioural disorder, some say that he could have abused even a Cypriot woman so it is not a racist act. So I went back to find out if he had had Cypriot women working for him and if he sexually harassed or abused the same.

Yes, he has Cypriot women still working for him in his shops but none of them has reported any harassment nor abuse. Some people, in my opinion, could say he is racist and expresses his racism in his sexual behaviour because his history of domestic workers shows that.

#### THE ROLE OF IMMIGRATION

What happened when she reported the case? She was sent out of the country. For a housemaid to be deported, the following documents are needed:

- Statement from her boss stating why he wants her deported.
- Statement from the housemaid explaining her 'offence'. This document is generally called the 'complaint'.
- A statement from the Immigration recommending or disapproving the deportation depending on what they read from both parties ie, employer and employee.
- These three documents are then sent to the Ministry of Interior and a deportation order is made, if the person handling the case feels that the maid needs to leave the country.

In this case, a deportation order was made without the Migration Department even receiving a statement from the employee! Just great!

This shows that the nineteen-year old girl was deported because Max wanted to be free. And clearly, there is someone at the Immigration Department, whose name I will not mention, who saw to the illegal deportation of a girl who has been trafficked and sexually abused (raped)! What other reason would an officer have for doing such a thing against a woman, if not that she is a migrant. Or maybe it was a good opportunity to make money, or gain some other benefit out of the desperate situation of a defenceless foreigner.

Max signed the contract that he would pay her 150 CYP each month but was actually paying her something about US\$ 40 in Zimbabwean currency. He stole from her, cheated and exploited her, even financially.

After all this, the cheat-rapist-trafficker gets away with it. No trial and no punishment.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF THE RAPE**

The decision to commit suicide comes from some kind of frustration. An ignorant 19-year old girl from a village in Africa in a situation like this, which resembles only things she had read about from books and watched on TV, found herself worthless of life. She lost her purpose of being. She explained to me in her email.

"I could not believe that his wife would not give me any support. It looked to me as if she agreed to what her husband was doing to me. I just had to die rather than see people I trusted treat me this way."

Before Blandina arrived home, Max called her family and told them his own story and said that every other thing Blandina would tell them was a lie. Well, whether or not she was raped, she faced the ISOLATION a woman who had sex before marriage would face in her village.

She is going through some severe TRAUMA. There are no social structures available to her for counselling to help her build up her self-esteem.

She has to live her whole life with the social stigma of having been raped. It is not an easy thing for a young woman to face without support.

### **DERBY**

Derby is her real name. She lived and worked with this family for seven months. She thought she was the only black person living in Nicosia if not Cyprus as a whole. She signed a contract stating that she would work eight hours a day and have one day off every week. She had to work only in one home. Every night for seven months she looked at that contract. She had secretly made a copy for herself. She knew that the contract was being violated but what could she do about it?

Derby worked for about 18 hours a day. From 7 am to 11 pm seven days a week. She cleaned the bosses flat and his sons' flat, which was

above, and then, cleaned the daughter's flat, which was underneath. She also cleaned the offices that were on the ground floor. So Derby was cleaning a whole block of flats. She made coffee and did laundry for the occupants of those three flats. She got so tired that she could not even eat.

Her Sunday duty was to wash all the cars of the occupants of the building, inside and outside. There were 5 cars for the normal family members. But, on the days when the girlfriend of the boss's son visits, there was an additional car. There was also the company bus/van, whatever! At Hyper Car Wash, at least three men wash one car and it takes about 15 minutes. Here is a woman doing this job normally done by three men, for five cars. There is just one reason for it.

It was on one of these Sunday mornings that she was seen by Comfort, a Ghanaian lady.

Derby was crying while washing the cars.

"Hello, my name is Comfort, I am from Ghana. Why are you crying? Can I help?"

"She was even afraid to talk to me" reported Comfort, "but I told her where I lived and I hoped she could steal time to come".

Since Derby did not know street names, she had to trace Comfort's house by counting as Comfort had told her.

Comfort and I, along with one of our friends, Niki, decided to pay this employer a visit and tell him a little about being human.

He first gave me the look of "who is this!", and then another look at Comfort. The third look was at the car we came in, not even the third person. Then the fourth look goes to Niki. "What can I do for you?"

"Hello", I said, and I introduced our crew. "We saw a girl who works for you crying last Sunday. We spoke with her and from our conversation we gather that she does not have a day off. You know

what is right; please give her a day off. She needs it to socialise with friends".

"She does not want to go out", he said.

"Can you please call her to tell us this, so that I can shower my anger on her for lying against you ... that you give her a day off and she does not want it", I said. That was sarcasm.

"Who are you to come and interrogate me in the first place? Why am I even talking to you?" he said.

"Because you have to. It will be good for you not to know exactly who I am because if you do, your pride is going to be too big for you to swallow. Let us get this sorted out here and now, because when I leave here without it being sorted, you may not like the turn it may take." I threatened.

He stayed quiet for a while and then said, "OK you go, and I will take care of the rest."

We needed to talk with Derby, so he was forced to bring her down. I gave Derby the address of the 'African Church' and Comfort promised to pick her up every Sunday morning.

She attended Church for three weeks then on the fourth week they decided she was not leaving the house because they had to go to Paphos. She must clean the apartment in Paphos. She went with them. When they came back from Paphos there was another excuse for her not to go to church. Guess what it was ... her madam would need coffee at 11 pm and 1 pm. She has to be there to make and serve the coffee.

Derby entered her room after telling her Madam that she was very inhumane and unchristian. With this, her Madam started screaming and crying that Derby wants to beat her up. Her son and husband went straight into the room, one pressing her to the floor and the other

hitting her. Then they took her passport and called the police for her to be taken to the airport.

God bless the heart of that policeman. He told them the truth

"You cannot deport her like that. Bring her out."

He saw Derby with a swollen face and asked her version of the story. He refused to take her passport and gave Derby his phone number to call him the next day. Well, Derby did not trust him enough. She was locked in again after the policeman left. So that night she jumped from the third flood to the ground and escaped to Comfort's house. The next morning she visited KISA and things were done properly. She now has her release papers and works on a farm.

#### **SLAVERY**

There is no other word that would do justice in describing a situation like this - where you are bound to one employer and have no choice but to do what he demands - stay home, do not go to church because I need coffee! Think about it. Slavery is the best word.

#### **BATTERY**

This is one of the things slaves face - they are beaten. She was beaten and locked up in a room to stop her from escaping.

She was even robbed of her devotion to God. She had no time of her own except to sleep. She was so tired that she could not pray.

Did I forget to mention that her food was the leftovers from the table? This was what she was offered.

These are just two cases. NGOs like KISA receive an average of eighty cases in a 'good' month. Rape, refusal of salary payments, slavery, physical abuse, sexual harassment, to name but a few, all against women who are migrant. There are also many that are not

reported. As long as you are a migrant you face these things. It is even worse when you are a migrant with a different skin colour.

### **FORTUNATE**

Walking along the street one day, I saw a young girl on the other side of the road. I waved at her and she waved back. I passed by, but turned to take a second look and then I saw her looking at me too. Embarrassed, I decided to walk back and start up a conversation with her!

When I got closer I saw that she must be very young, or in such a condition that her maturity had been inhibited. Her breasts were very small; in fact she was almost flat-chested. Her dress was the kind of dress a 15-year-old girl would wear to her friend's birthday. She was in semi high-heeled shoes and wore no make-up. Her hair was tough, raw, unkempt and also very short. Her teeth were immaculately white; her lips were thin, dry and cracked. Her eyebrows were very widespread and I think she had lost her eyelashes, because I cannot remember seeing any. She had a smile on her face, but behind that smile was a heart heavy with pain, confusion and fear.

"My name is Beryl and I am from Cameroon" I said.

"I am Fortunate".

I laughed at her name. 'These people really give their daughters names that follow them till death' I thought to myself. "I will never forget your name" I joked!

"Where are you coming from and where are you going to?" Before she could answer this I added, "Are you OK?" I added this because her eyes filled with tears during that short moment. But she was still smiling!

"I've come from my boss's office and I am going to his house".

"Why do you want to cry? Do you need anything?"

"I need help, I am ill, and I told him I had to go to the hospital, but he said I was pretending. I have to be home in thirty minutes so that his wife can go out, but there is no way I can reach his house in thirty minutes. So I am sure she is going to insult me. But I am late because he gave me too much work to do in the office". At this point Fortunate was crying and I could just see that her name had nothing to do with her life, at least not today. I did not have a car myself, but she needed help.

"Oh Jesus, bless this little girl. Give her the strength to take the things she cannot change."

"Take my number, try to call me when you can and we will talk about your condition. I will tell some people who can help you. Do not cry."

Though her voice sounded like that of a shy child, her grammar was simple and impeccable. She must have gone to school enough to speak and express herself the way she did, or her parents taught her well!

Four weeks went by and there was no call from Fortunate. I was wondering if she was alright. Then one day I got a call. "Hello, my name is Gracia. I got your number from Fortunate. I need to talk to you. I need to come to your place. Please do not say no. Just tell me where you are".

I told her the number of the bus that passes near my house and in one hour she was there. I gave her a hug - not a handshake! She then started crying and laughing at the same time. "Please let us get away from the road. I have just run away from my employer, so I know that they will be trying to find me".

At my house, I gave her some food and asked her how many people knew she was at my place. "Only Fortunate" she said. After a long pause she said, "Fortunate is just a child and with the least intimidation she may tell her boss where I am, so I am sure that they will call you".

I thanked her for letting me know. But you can't send someone like that on the streets. She ate and then began her story.

She fell in love with a certain man back in her country. This man was a Cypriot and felt the need to help her. So he got his friend to get employment papers for her to come and work as a domestic worker.

He told her exactly what the salary would be, but could not predict exactly what her living and working conditions would be like. He just said, "since the people are my friends, they will be nice to you."

Well, Gracia did not have grace at all!

She had been working for three months and she did not have any idea if she had a salary at all. Her bank book was kept away from her so she could not access her money (if the money was actually put there)!

"I even work for two homes. The days are not shared; I work in both homes every day. I work for fourteen to sixteen hours a day. I cut the grass and plant the flowers. I wash the cars and do the laundry of both households. If someone rings the bell and I open the door, the next thing I am expected to do is take the cleaning liquid and a piece of cloth and clean the bell. Now, this makes me think that the people are ill somehow."

"Now do not get me wrong", she added, "I would do the work without complaining if only they reduce my work hours and give me my bank book. I am working because I need the money. If they are not going to pay me, I would prefer to go back home. But, I am not going to leave without my money".

She continued, "I went and saw a lawyer about it and asked him to tell me what to do. He told me to go to the labour office and file a complaint. But when I went to him and showed him the paper I had from the labour office, he told me that my employers are his friends and he had informed them about my plans to leave. They have taken my papers (passport, Alien card and contract) to the Immigration

Office and Immigration is looking for me. I need a place to stay and sort myself out. That is why I called you.

What a story, I thought! She really needed to sort this out. As I listened to her story, I also observed her closely. Unlike Fortunate, she was a brave 'woman'. Determined to go back home rather than be used or misused by people whom she thought were ill.

She cried, but she also laughed at the same time. The laughter was not because something was funny. It was out of confusion. I could see she was not going to leave this country without her hard-earned money. All she needed was a bed, food to eat and time to sort herself out. These I could provide without much pain. I gave up my bed and used the couch. Food was not a problem, time was at her disposal because she was not working, and in addition I gave her counsel and also told her to trust in God; after all, "everything works for good for those who trust God and are called according to His purpose".

She was eager to see where that was written in the Bible, and I showed it to her, also explaining:

"Gracia, that verse says 'everything', which means good things and bad things. The result will always be to your benefit, if only you trust in God."

Gracia joined me in my morning devotions and prayer every day. She then started asking me questions about what I believe and where I got my strength. She could see I also had problems, but she wondered how I managed to cope with them. I showed her Psalms 121: 'My strength comes from the Lord'.

We lived together for about two weeks, then 'bang' came the phone call from the police. I believe that the phone call came at the wrong time because she just started trusting the God of heaven, and I knew she needed more time with someone to guide her. Well with that call she had to leave.

We hid her in Sana's house. Sana is a Cypriot of a different pigmentation and the kind of woman that was very difficult to mess around with. Gracia baby-sat Sana's kids and Sana paid her. While at Sana's house, Sana got another lawyer and paid the fee to get a release paper for Gracia. This lawyer turned out to be same as the first! He took the money and did nothing but put Gracia in the mouth of the lion and lioness. He called Sana and said "Take Gracia to the Immigration Department, her release papers are ready".

Sana doubted this for a while. "I thought you had to bring the papers to your office and call us to get them from there. How come we have to go to the Immigration Department to get the papers?"

"You paid me to get the papers made, you did not pay me to bring them to you", said the lawyer.

"How much more do you want to bring the papers?"

"I do not have time for that. Why don't you just go and get them? It is easy."

Well, Sana went to the Immigration Office, introduced herself and said exactly why she was there. Then the officers took her into an office and gave her a form to complete. At a certain point they started speaking in Greek, thinking she did not understand. She also pretended not to understand for a while. When she had all the information she wanted and understood all their schemes, she laughed and replied to them in good Greek,

"Gracia prefers to go back to her country. All she needs is her salary for three months. She does not want to live here and be misused by sick people. Why are you in a haste to get her out? Be in a haste to give her money and it will save you the trouble of trying to make deportation papers."

In shock, a mavrou (black) speaking such Greek! They congratulated Sana for her Greek and asked her where she had learned such fluent

Greek. After flattering her, they told her to tell Gracia to come in a taxi and they would pay the fare.

"I do not need your flatteries. I speak Greek because I am Cypriot. Do you people think that all Cypriots should be white-skinned? Gracia is not going to come here until you call her employers to come and bring Gracia's bank book with them. You want to deport her without salary for three months? That is not going to happen". How I love that attitude!

After a long argument they called the employer who, before coming, went to the bank and deposited CY £450. He forgot that the bank also puts in the bank book the date when they receive payments. How wise!

This employer exposed his true self when he brought out the bank book to prove that he "has been paying".

"You have not been paying" Sana said, "you just paid this today. Look at the date. If you really want her to leave so badly you could have brought the money and return ticket with you."

"I didn't put my address on the form you gave me to complete, but you have my phone number. When you have Gracia's salary in cash, call me." Sana left.

After the Immigration Department found out that the employer had breached the contract by not paying this woman for three months, they could have done the right thing and given her the release papers to look for other employment, as the law states. However, nobody mentioned anything about this.

They contacted the lawyer who had Sana's address and arrested Gracia and put her in jail in Latsia. We visited her twice and when she left she sent us letters and e-mails.

Gracia wrote to me:

Dear Beryl,

I thank you so much for the sacrifice you did on my behalf. Looking at you, I saw a very different kind of woman. I now believe that thing you told me, that I just needed to trust in God and everything will be fine. Well I came back home and got back to sculpturing, which was my work. I registered for a competition, and won. My works are being exhibited in Johannesburg next year from 17 May 17 June. I surely would not have had this if I stayed in Cyprus with my sick employers. I am happy now. I trust in the God you introduced to me. I have bought a Bible and I am attending the church you attend. Jesus is good to me. I am also pregnant and will have my baby before the exhibition. Thank you for everything. I have also written to Sana. Help her to trust in the Lord. I love you so very much.

Your sister,  
Gracia.

You must have been wondering why I called this section 'Fortunate' and then talked about Gracia. Let us go back to Fortunate.

She called me one Sabbath morning; I was on my way to church.

"Hello, I am on my way to church now."

"Are you a Seventh-day Adventist Christian?"

"Yes I am"

"Oh, thank you God. I am also an SDA Christian, but my employers would not allow me to go to church."

"Tell them you would prefer to work on Sunday and have Sabbath free".

Well she tried this, and the employers accepted. Praise God!

Every Saturday, Fortunate came to church. Her employers accepted readily because she would not meet with other housemaids and get 'corrupted' by their ideas. Most housemaids are out on Sundays. We talked every Saturday.

Her room was the balcony and they had just placed some plywood to complete the walls. She was told that it was better than her house in her country. This 'bedroom' was very cold in winter and had no heating appliance. She did not even know they could buy one for CY £15, even though she complained about the cold weather. Her bed was a summer camp mattress on the floor. So she got an old floor carpet and put it under her mattress to make it a little warmer. In summer it was paradise!

When I asked her about her plans, she said, "I have worked for almost a year and half in this poor hostile condition. They have not changed one bit to love me or accept me as a human being. But they pay me every month. I have my bank book with me and I know exactly how much money I have. I will persevere and move to England because I do not need a visa. My friend is there and I will live with her and continue my education."

"I have already applied for admission". I was proud of her.

A few weeks later, her mother and sister had an accident and her mother died. She had to go home and show her respects at the funeral. That was something I could not do when my mum died. I was not told anyway. I went home two months after she had been buried. I received her death with much trauma and shock that still follows me today.

Anyhow, Fortunate left for home and came back about a week later.

In her absence, the reply from the school she applied for in England arrived. Her boss delved into her privacy by opening the mail. When he realised what it was, he grew very furious.

As kind as her employers could be, they gave her a few weeks to relax from the bereavement. Then one fine day, the mistress took upon her.

Read Fortunate's letter to me:

*Dear Auntie Beryl,*

*I hope you are fine. Well my boss deported me. He came to my room one morning with an envelope in his hand. This envelope was addressed to me. But it was open when he gave it to me, and it was my admission letter to Newbold College in England. He said I was doing things behind his back, and he was not going to let me go to the College. He seized my cell phone, and locked me inside the room. His wife popped in and told me to pack up my suitcase, and the next thing I knew, I was on my way to the airport. I do not understand why my admission letter was a threat to them. I was going to start school in spring, which was about 9 months from the day they deported me. I did not cry ... surprisingly! But I told them at the airport that I believe that God in heaven sees this and that revenge is His. Well I am home now with my sisters. Life is very difficult, but we are surviving. I paid money for my admission, and my first semester fee, so I came back home with almost no money. I cannot imagine why my employers did this to me.*

*I will still go to school and I am determined to meet my employers again someday before Jesus comes.*

*I am very sorry that I gave your number to the police when they wanted Gracia. It was because they threatened to beat me up. I am sorry for all the problems I caused by just telling them the number. God is with you and He will guide you as you trust Him always.*

*God bless you,  
Fortunate.*

I wonder if you see what I see here! I see a woman and her husband playing God in a young woman's life. Deciding to deprive her of her education and making her depend on them for all her decisions.

Terrible! It was not enough for them to make her stay in very harsh conditions in winter; they also had to stop her from making her life better.

These problems are common to the majority of women who are domestic workers. A Chinese domestic worker gets raped by her employer. She goes to the police, files a report and the police send her back to the employer. The employer takes her to go and work on the farm and rapes her again. This time he tore her clothes. She ran naked to the nearest house and asks for clothing, then goes back to the same police station and is told that if she reports anywhere else, she will be deported.

## **EXPERIENCES OF TRAFFICKED WOMEN IN THE SEX INDUSTRY**

"Because he had drunk a lot of Vodka, I got into the car thinking that he will not have the strength to have sex. Instead of driving to a hotel, he stopped on the highway where there was an exit, and told me to come out. Well he kept raping me repeatedly for hours and when I cried, he would slap me. This happened until it was almost dawn, then I passed out. I woke up and found out that I was in the hospital".

For those who might be thinking what a sex industry is, I should tell you that you are not alone. I read about words like that in my sociology course at university, but never thought they were real. When I came to Cyprus, it was where I saw it happening. I cried for my notebooks, but could not find them anywhere. I wanted to call my sociology lecturer, but she had died. I needed to tell her that what she told me was true! Call me naive, ignorant or even old-fashioned!

The residence permits of workers in the sex industry (in Cyprus) are issued by the Ministry of the Interior, without the Ministry of Labour

being involved as in the case of other migrant workers. Through the abuse of this system, women are imported from other countries for the sole purpose of prostituting. They are called ARTISTES. The money they make is shared between an employer, The Pimp, and the girl who actually does the work.

I had the opportunity of meeting and talking with some women working in the sex industry during a data collecting exercise for the John Hopkins University. How interesting!

I asked the women from this university why they chose Cyprus. Their response was very fascinating. They chose Cyprus because in their search for countries where trafficking is practiced, they read that women in the sex industry in Cyprus are mostly trafficked women.

There are brothels in all countries and prostitution, as we hear over the radios and watch on TV, is a subject that is under a lot of debate. Some women think that it is right to be a prostitute and it is just an occupation, like being a nurse or school teacher. Some think that it is degrading.

In my conversation with the women in the cabarets, all of them mentioned that they would do something else for a living if they were given the chance to start all over again. None of them would want to be a prostitute if they could 'turn back the hands of the clock'

In trying to find out why they hate it, and yet do it, I got the following explanations:

- I am trapped. If someone would assure me that I will be safe if I run away, I would leave immediately.
- These guys are dangerous. I prefer this trouble to the one I may get should I want to leave without their consent.

In the publication *The Cabaret Artistes in Cyprus* (quoted in page 11), it is written: "they are raped and beaten until they submit to performing

a sexual service" (page 21). So this kind of 'trouble' is what a woman prefers because she has been warned of worse 'trouble' if she tries to run away. This exposes the fact that the pimps have made the women to believe that they are the most powerful people in their lives.

- What other job do you think I will get after everybody knows I have worked in a cabaret? I have no options.

Of those women no one was told before their arrival that having sex with customers was part of the job. To them working in a cabaret was doing strip dancing, for entertainment alone!

The word 'cabaret' in other countries is a place for entertainment. The places where sex is sold by any means are not called cabarets. I called up friends in other countries and checked the Internet. I found out that it is exclusively in Cyprus that 'cabaret', successfully got its definition changed to a "women selling sex shop". Try it yourself, ask your friends in other countries what cabarets are. They are entertainment places with dancers – both men and women.

People, often use the phrase, "it is only in Cyprus" or "this is Cyprus", when they see things go wrong and nobody does anything about them. Things like refusing someone to enter the country with a valid visa in his passport, issued by a Cypriot Embassy, thereby saying that the embassy has no right to issue visas; the police harassing people in their homes and beating them up, or the CID beating up a man after bashing his car! For a good example, an English man was taken to court and fined because he said to an Arab migrant in the streets of London "You Fuck'n Arab"; but it is ONLY IN CYPRUS that a journalist writes in the MAXI newspaper calling Koffi Anan a "black Monkey", and nothing is done.

Read on!

### **SOLD AS A SEX WORKER BY MY BOYFRIEND**

"When he took me for dinners and to pubs, he was trying to find the person who would pay the highest amount. He definitely found one because I am here today working for someone I do not know and no one will tell me where my boyfriend is".

"I am from Moldavia. I met a man in my country and we fell in love, he said he was a British Cypriot. At that time, I really thought we loved each other. I loved him, so with permission from my mother, I told him to move in with us and not pay hotel bills. We stayed together for a month and he suggested that we move to England because he had to go back to work and we would cohabit. Brilliant idea! On our way to England we had to stop over in Cyprus for a few days to see his friends. In Cyprus, we had a good time and he introduced me to his Greek speaking friends. They would look at me and make comments. At that time I really did not understand what was going on, but now I do! After visiting different pubs and being introduced, we went to sleep in a hotel, because he did not want to bother his friends.

"One night we came back to the hotel and slept. When I woke up in the morning, he was gone, along with his luggage. But there were two other men in the room. That was the beginning of my nightmare! I asked the men where my boyfriend was, and they told me he had gone to England. They revealed to me that they paid him to leave me with them. I can only get my freedom when I pay back their money and I can only do that by working for them. I was taken to a cabaret to watch other women working and then I was trained. Here I am today prostituting."

"It was not that smooth. They beat me up every time I tried to be disobedient and would not have sex with a client. The man raped me many times and told me that it is the only way to get me to loosen up. He would say words like "I paid a lot for you and I cannot afford to have you lose money by not accepting to have sex with the customers." "My passport was taken away from me. I do not even know who took it. There is a man always in front of our flat checking

what we are doing, so I am very afraid. I went and telephoned my mother to get me another passport so that I can leave one day. I hope it will be soon."\*

Read this!

She is tall, extraordinarily tall, for a woman. Gush! What a beauty: Perfect manicure. The hairdresser wondered how the client's pedicure would be. She could not see her feet because Aldin (the client) wore boots. Her hips were so well rounded (but not exactly like the hips of an African woman). Her skirt was short and the boots covered her legs right up to the knee, it was difficult really to see how beautiful her legs were. When she took off her jacket, the hairdresser could see that she had 'played' with her breasts. They were silicon! Well, she must have a lot of money to keep herself looking this great. The eyes took the journey on to her face and Aldin gave her a smile. She smiled back. "Hm hm", the hairdresser cleared her throat. "You are one piece of hand work," she said. She shook her head and asked her for the colour of hair extensions she would like to have.

"You have been looking at me for some time", Aldin said.

"Yes I have", she confessed.

She smiled again, and said, "Did you notice anything?"

Well, the shoulders were broad and she looked very athletic. Her voice was deep. In any case, the hairdresser admires women with that kind of voice, especially when they sing jazz.

---

\* This story sounds unbelievable, but it is true. This girl wants to remain anonymous because "these men are dangerous"! The man who pretended to be a loving boyfriend is definitely a trafficker. The nights he went out with her and 'introduced' her, as his 'girlfriend' were when he was negotiating his price for the woman he has successfully brought! When he got the money he thought was enough for him, he sold her. Another thing to realise is that this girl was drugged. I asked her whether they gave her drugs and she refused to answer the question.

"You could sing very well. I am a singer with a very wide vocal range. From the way you speak, your voice could go deeper than mine. Do you like singing?" said the hairdresser!

"Nope! Singers are very poor. No matter how famous they are, they are always in debt and they envy each other. I like listening to music though!"

She took off her wig. Guess what! The cut of her temple was very masculine!

Her hair was braided and the hairdresser decided to keep her contacts for more business. She promised she would call every month when she needed to change her hairstyle. Great! Money for her rent! But when you get close, you cannot charge them squarely, so the hairdresser decided not to make any friendly phone call. That was cruel.

Why should a woman with such an athletic body not play basketball, volleyball, or some other ball game but work in a cabaret.

Here is the answer.

She was a man. I am really scared to write out every thing I found out about him/her. She/he worked in a cabaret and made a lot of money.

The question is why would he want to look like a woman for this reason? The answer is clear. Some men go to the cabaret because their wives would rightfully refuse to have anal sex with them. Where else can they get it, but in a cabaret, with someone who does not have a problem with it.

So whether or not they are homosexuals, they get involved in homosexual acts just to satisfy the craving for anal sex. He/she makes 'money'. She/he has a say in her pay because she/he is masculine and can stand up to the pimps.

Anybody making such information public, like I am now, should be scared because the world of pimps and sex workers is a dangerous one. However, I think something needs to be done about it.

In recent times, growing number of Cypriot men have begun to marry cabaret artistes. According to our interviews during the John Hopkins University sponsored studies Cypriot men did not marry the south Asian women working in cabaret at the same rate which they marry their Eastern European counterparts.

One ex-cabaret worker told me " I married him because I wanted to get out of that stupid, dirty place and to try and live a descent life.

The same research shows that 1200 civil marriages are documented annually between foreign women and Cypriot men (as opposed to only 70 of Cypriot women to foreign men). One out of every eight cabaret worker marries a Cypriot man who met her in the cabaret. This shows that the cabarets are always in want of women to take the place of those that leave, which explains why the business of trafficking is a lucrative and flourishing one and therefore needs a lot of effort to combat.

Between Larnaca and Nicosia I asked twenty women the question: "Do you think that the Cabaret worker likes her job?" All of them answered 'yes'.

When I asked them why they thought the cabaret worker likes her job, all of them said 'because they make a lot of money.'

The women I selected for this two-question interview are Teachers, Hairdressers, Nurses, Beauticians, Waitresses, because I was looking for the answer from a group that had little or no contact with cabaret workers, like a good majority of the female population in our society. Dr. Anna Agathangelou (Professor – York University, Canada and Author of *Global Political Economy of Sex: Desires Violence and Insecurities in the Mediterranean Nation States*), giving her closing remarks at the Conference on Trafficking in Persons, confirms this. She said: "The Cypriot population lacks knowledge and understanding

of the extent of human trafficking and the extent of the abuse suffered by cabaret dancers. The residents of the Island share many misconceptions. The women are therefore not viewed as victims, but as prostitutes'.

Some of the cabaret workers have managed to escape and some have done a lot to change their physical appearances during the early months after the escape for fear of being recognised. Some decided to stay indoors for months and thus became illegal aliens. This is just some of the ordeals they go through after escaping, if they are not caught.

There is also a story of a Russian cabaret worker who was trying to escape, published in a Russian magazine in 2002. (Also in the web-page: [http://www.newru.com/world/26Nov2003/sex\\_slave.html](http://www.newru.com/world/26Nov2003/sex_slave.html) )

According to this story, this woman had tied several bed sheets together making a rope to get down the wall. The sheets gave way and she crashed to the road and died.

Another woman, Georgia, a successful escapee, said to me: "I had been beaten up many times for refusing to have sex without protection. Apart from that, some of the clients get turned on only after they think they are raping the woman. So, they would tell me to refuse to have sex, they would beat me up and then 'rape' me. I tried running away once, but I was caught and having sex with 6 men that night was part of my punishment. My pimp would just collect the money and tell them to wait until their turn. But one of the men, Pambos, told the pimp he wanted to take me out, so we went out and I found him to be a nice person. So I explained my ordeal to him. We also made our escape plans: One night Pambos came and sat with me as a client and told me that I would go out with him to have sex because he had already paid. He offered me four drinks in order to reach the amount of drinks that would allow me to go with him. We had arranged everything. I left with him that night. Thanks to his help, I will never return to the cabaret."

There are many other cabaret dancers waiting for angels like Pambos to save them. They unfortunately cannot find the opportunity like Georgia because such 'angels' like Pambos are also difficult to come by.

Another woman gave to me her story in writing before going back home to Russia: "There is really a God in this world. I am giving this interview before leaving to go home so that I can work decently. It is better to be home and poor but free" *than to be a sex slave in another country* (text in italics supplied).

She continues: "I was lucky as three days latter (after meeting a Russian man to whom she had told her desire to escape or die), both of my bosses were drunk and the guard had been drunk as well. I stole my passport and ran away from the bar. I was frightened; I could not believe what I had done. I spent the night wondering the streets because if I had gone to the Russian man's house, they could have found me. They actually went there to look for me. Early in the morning, I called the man who came and took me from under the bridge and took me to Father Savvas (a Russian Orthodox priest who shelters cabaret dancers who escape).

For trafficking to have an effective opposing force, the society has to stop looking at these women as prostitutes and home breakers and start treating them as victims who have been most of the time brainwashed and drugged and generally abused. A woman who has been beaten up and raped repeatedly said: "I love my pimp, he is the best". Of course that is not true. Her mind has been played with so that she sees her pimp as a protector rather than as an exploiter.

#### **PROSTITUTE BY CHOICE**

Something worth mentioning is my observation of one woman who became a prostitute by her own choice. She was neither forced nor trafficked. It is different when one is aware of her duties as a prostitute and accepts to do it, before she migrates. I met two women of this category but only one of them accepted to speak with me.

Some of those lovely women would take the pain and get thousands of pounds a month rather than work in a house and get 150 CYP and no six hour outing a week!

In some cabarets that I visited, there are women who do not like what they do. But they do it any way for various reasons, for example, getting rich in a short time, not having to pay rent, etc.

The story you are about to read now is very interesting. It did not happen in a cabaret.

The literal translation of the name of a street I know is "The Road of Angels". Maybe you want to call it "The Angels' Gateway".

Do not ask me why, but for almost a year, I've been going to that street at least four times a week during the day to observe what happens there. It is flooded with prostitutes. During the day the street looks dirty, flanked by old houses on both sides, and there are hundreds of homeless cats that parade the street. During the mating season the sound of cats trying to attract the opposite sex fills the air. In summer doors are left open. But in winter apartments are heated by burning wood in special aluminium pots.

Looking at this very street at night may make one wonder if it was the same street during the day. Its lighting is different. There are no super bright bulbs, but each brothel has dim sets of tiny bulbs that give out different colours of light. These are arranged on the roof edge of the building.

There is an arrow sign made by yellow light from tiny blinking bulbs pointing to a certain direction. I followed this direction one night and ended up in one of the most sophisticated bars I have ever seen. This building looks like a deserted house during the day. I went there the next day to see if what I experienced the previous night was real. Yes it was.

I observed that the people living, working and walking along that street despised the prostitutes. But why? After all they are humans. So I took my chances and started smiling at every one of them I met.

Creating this connection was easy because I know that sometimes they want to ask me certain questions; where are you from, why do you come here, do you speak Greek? I said a "hello" once. It was very much appreciated and I could see the longing for acceptance in the faces of these women. They could do with real friends. Not those who would criticise, misuse or beat them.

Because they always saw me when I was not sad, they always found a smile on my face and music on my lips. My "Kalimera sas" (Good Morning to you) came with a smile that provokes the other person to smile back. This seemed strange to them; so one of them asked me if I smoked weed in the morning.

Great! I do not. My source of joy is greater. How much I wanted them to know this Source.

I also observed that these women did not live in those apartments. They came at about nine in the morning and left later. Something else that happened is that when I dared to pass there at night, there were different women. I passed there four times or more at night with the same observation, so I made the conclusion that those who work at night, are different from those who work during the day.

I heard one of them talking on the phone one morning, in a foreign language (not Greek or English). That attracted me. So I went into that single door apartment and started up a conversation by giving the smile - that hurts no one. She also spoke some English and so communication was not a problem. We talked for some time and I realised that she knew exactly what I wanted to know, even if I was trying to be polite.

Beryl: Do you live here?

Answer: No I work here during the day. Do you also want to ask what kind of work I do? (Now I thought she was being too direct for me)

Beryl: (I smiled, and rubbed her shoulder with a lot of love, concern and respect. I do not know how I managed to combine those three).

Answer: I have customers who come to see me and they pay me.

Beryl: You are very pretty (this was not flattery).

Answer: Yes I know.

She could see that at this point I was speechless. Would she think I am really doing research, or that I wanted to laugh at her? She was so smart. She read right through me and then said: "You have many questions to ask me. I would rather you ask me because I have a customer coming soon and when he comes you will have to go."

"I have children, my first daughter is 25 years old and married. I speak English because I was married to an African man from Sierra Leone. That daughter of mine is half-caste. I have a boy who lives with me, a very handsome boy."

Beryl: Wao! From what I see, you are not forced into prostitution, so why do you do it?

Answer: Men are what I call a 'necessary evil'. They do not know what love is. Those that I have met and those that come across my path are all the same. I fall in love and remain faithful to them. All they do is break my heart, run away with my friends, impregnate the house-help, have sex with the next door neighbour ... I just do not want to fall in love again. I need to have sex. So what the heck? I have sex and am paid for it. Great! I am not forced to do it, so I enjoy it and I get paid.

Oopse! There is a taxi at the door. I think it brought my next customer. Look, go through the back so he does not think you are a prostitute.

Beryl: Can I come back tomorrow?

Answer: It will take ten minutes, maximum. Hang around!

It was my break and I had to get back to work.

That conversation never continued. Not because I did not see her every day, but because I got the other answers to my questions by observing her in particular.

She came to the brothel only when she had customers. Her customers were not exactly the low class kind of men. Though they came in taxis, I believe this was a way to hide their identity – car registration. They were well dressed and I believe they respected her. I still see her. I speak with her when I am not late for work. She likes my smiling face and still believes that it is due to smoking some other thing than tobacco.

I must admit that I admire this lady's honesty. She feels good being a prostitute because she does not want to fall in love and get hurt. You may be thinking something like 'how foolish'. But you know, getting hurt again and again by men to whom you give your all; it takes the power of a Divine Being to stop you from becoming someone who just has sex and does not make love. When there is no relationship between the person who is hurt and some kind of source of strength, prostituting, or better still sexual promiscuity may be a very easy thing to do.

In that brothel, there are nationals too. I did not interview them. But I observed that one of them had a pimp who was her boyfriend. He waited for her outside while she 'worked' and took the money from her when she came out ... most of the time about two minutes after the customer has gone. I never got to know the nationality of the woman, but this pimp/boyfriend of hers is a local.

Sociological research has shown that men are generally more promiscuous than women. So it is more difficult to be a prostitute than many people think. Even when a woman decides to be a prostitute she goes through emotional pain. All of them told me that they get angry after having sex, especially during the summer when they had to work during the day - angry with themselves and everything around.

It is easier for a man to have sex without passion and forget about it, walking away like they just had a drink of water. But it takes a lot of strength for a woman to do the same. A woman understands what a man calls 'sexual clicking' differently. In other words, when a man and woman meet, the man will want sex immediately, whereas the woman may want to pursue a platonic relationship.

I asked someone I know to tell me about his experience with a sex worker. I asked him if he was passionate and treated the lady kindly. Treating her kindly, yes; but with passion, no. He further explained that most men in the nightclub circles have sex 'like animals'. I screamed and for a while I started thinking how animals have sex.

I grew in a small village and my family reared goats and fowls. These animals had sex with their kinds and, of course, with the opposite sex. There was neither passion nor respect in the process. Here is a man saying that when men are with prostitutes they have sex with them like animals. This explains why the most of the people who insult prostitutes are men.

#### **OBSERVATIONS & SUGGESTIONS FROM THE SEX INDUSTRY AND DOMESTIC WORKERS**

During my research, I had to do in-depth interviews with all the women. This means nights or days trying to get in touch with a sex worker. I would like to mention my observations and put forward some suggestions.

#### **The sex industry and the domestic workers**

In the sex industry, there are many women who were *trafficked* into the profession. Some are nurses, doctors, sociologists, you name it! But they find themselves in situations that we can hardly begin to understand! They are locked up like prisoners. They are watched by some thug so they have no life of their own. One of them revealed that she couldn't even go out because the clothes she owns are only good for her job. Wearing those clothes during the day and walking along the streets is just impossible! The clothes are suitable only for the beach or the swimming pools.

I also observed that the pimps can decide to have sex with whichever woman they want in their lot. She has no right to say 'No'. It may even be her fault if she has her period and sex may be nasty!

They eat healthy foods, but once a day in order to maintain their weight and shape.

Since trafficking is a highly organised crime, sometimes these women are made to have sex with men without charge, as a gesture of appreciation from the pimps to the customers. The regular customers are the 'high and mighty'.

There is a significant use of sedatives and narcotics at different times of the day.

They are not allowed to go out without the express permission of the pimp who would, in most of the cases, add a threat if they return later than expected. There are always thugs around them. In their residence they are not allowed to have visitors who are strangers.

I observed that the sex industry, as a whole, has a department under cover. There are some women who are also used as 'sex-workers' but not in the known cabarets. I call this low-level operation the 'Mini Sex Industry (MSI)'.

The MSI operates on a very small scale and is very well disguised. On this scale taxes are not paid and the ladies do not come in like sex workers, they come in like domestic workers.

A Filipino woman who works as a domestic worker relates her best friend's story:

"Nnena (not her real name) was raped by her boss's son. When she reported the rape to her boss, he also raped her as punishment for talking against his son. She tried to run away but they traced her and took her back. She is pregnant but does not know if the father of the child is the boss or the boss's son. I do not see her anymore, but I know that she is devastated. Please pray for her.

Why didn't she call the police? Well she did and was kept in the cell for protection from her boss. Then to really protect her from her boss ... she was deported!

Two Russian ladies got their visas to come work in a certain hotel. At the airport, they were picked up by their employer. He took them to a certain hotel and called up his friend to 'test' them if they fit enough for the job. The women were raped and threatened. Fortunately these women succeeded in talking to someone who encouraged them to report it to the police.

Another pair of Russian ladies with the same work visa came in to Cyprus. They also got picked up by their employer at the airport. This time around the employer did not invite a friend, but he had them separated from each other. He explained he would take them to where they would be working, but because their destinations were in different directions, he had to take them one at a time. So he raped one near the beach somewhere near Larnaca, left her there and then came home for the other. He also took her to another beach and raped her.

A lady working in a pub in Limassol was forced by her employer to have sex with customers and no matter how much money was paid, she received thirty pounds. She did not just have to do this once a night. She was forced to have sex with as many men that came in. So

against her will, she had sex with them one after the other, even crying in the process and begging them to stop. She took the employer to court. I hope that she will not be deported when the period of her visa elapses, but will be able to stay to see this injustice through to the end.

These are experiences of women who have been trafficked and yet are not working in 'cabarets'. They face equal problems like those who work in the cabarets.

The MSI is becoming rampant. Who are the victims?

Foreign women.

Most of these stories go unreported for various reasons.

One woman said 'because the women are scared of being stigmatised'; another reason that came up was that most of the time the sex offenders are friends of people in powerful positions and nothing would be done anyway. The girl would end up being deported because the offender needs to be protected.

Generally these women in the sex industry (cabarets or in the MSI) are depressed. Those in the cabarets have access to substances that "get them out" of their depression for some time, especially when they have to work. However, the women in the MSI do not use these substances and do not even know that they have an illness called depression that needs help.

### Suggestions

Women's NGOs should do more in the area of trafficking. It is going to help a great deal if some organisations concentrate on helping the women who are trafficked to get out of the hands of the people they described to me as 'dangerous'.

It was very difficult to get to the women in the sex industries and also difficult to get access to a domestic worker who has been sexually abused. The reason is that the employer immediately becomes

concerned about his reputation. To protect himself he cuts all communication between the abused domestic worker and society. This is in addition to the threats that are given. The point is, I am also a foreigner so I find myself in this vulnerable group. If I can get to these women, I believe that any organisation can. However, any organisation that wants to do this really needs to be committed to the cause.

Concerning what I have described as the 'Mini Sex Industry', you must have realised that I am talking about families and individuals who do not own the so-called cabarets, but yet they bring in women as housemaids, bar-maids, hotel cleaners, or whatever and also use them for sexual pleasure against their will.

I suggest that the contracts of employment should clearly state that the employee has the right to legal procedures if she is abused either physically, sexually, or other wise. When the employer gets the contract and reads it, he/she should also know that he/she could be tried in a court of law when he/she abuses his/her employee.

This should not only be mentioned but the employee should also be made aware by being given a copy of the contract and having the contract explained. When I did the interviews with domestic workers, I observed that the employers keep the contract copies from their employees for the obvious reason that they do not want the employee to understand when or how she is being used, misused, or exploited. Take the case of Gracia and see how angry her employers became when they found out she had read the contract! In cases where the said employee cannot read nor understand the language of the contract, it should be the responsibility of the employer to find someone neutral, preferably a good lawyer (not like Gracia's), to explain and if necessary get a translator. This is not too much to ask if it will solve future problems of exploitation.

When domestic workers are exploited and the terms of contracts are violated the domestic worker gets a release paper and leaves the employer if she is lucky. That is usually the end. Most of the time the end is when the employer succeeds in getting the girl illegally deported. Unbelievable, but true with the help of 'friends in high places'. Such an employer gets yet another domestic worker and treats her even worse. The only reason for this is that none of these employers have ever been tried for these acts.

I am hereby suggesting that after the release paper is given by the labour office, the said employer should actually be tried in the court of law for whatever the domestic worker is claiming happened to her, following the right procedures of course. In most cases, it is a problem of sexual abuse, battery, no payment of salaries or working more than required.

A Russian lady in prison gets raped by a police man. She fell 'ill' and was taken to the hospital where she decided to tell the medical doctor the truth about what had happened. The doctor examined her and found evidence of forced sex. This policeman claims that he raped her because she invited it by dressing 'seductively' – in prison that is.

Check out our police force – raping women and sending raped women into custody of the rapist! Bravo!

I suggest that domestic workers should have the right to take their employers to court for serious offences and be informed of this right.

Provisions should be made to see that the domestic worker has decent living conditions. Fortunate lived in the balcony and used her suitcase for a pillow. The heating facilities given to her during the winter were not sufficient. Another lady slept in the store room with mechanical tools and old generators.

The domestic worker should have her privacy and that needs to be respected. It is not right for an employer to intercept and open their mail, or search their boxes and wardrobes without their permission.

## EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE REFUGEES

I happened to have been the research coordinator for a Refugee Profiling exercise done by KISA. During this period I came into contact with a number of female refugees. I revisited them and explained why I needed the information. They gave me permission to publish their experiences but without mentioning names, specific countries of origin and residential addresses.

### ANITA

"I arrived in Cyprus and was illegal for six months. Then some friends took me to the Red Cross where we filled out some papers. After some months they called me for an interview and I was subsequently recognised as a Refugee. I thought things would be better".

"For those six months when I was illegal, I could not find work. Everybody was afraid to employ me. After my application, I got a visa to work and everywhere I went to find work the boss would sexually harass me. I went to the Welfare Office and filled out some forms. But I NEVER received money. I was very miserable. The friends with whom I was living were very kind. They were working and they could see that I had a lot of problems. But they are just human. After many months I was still not contributing to food or rent. I realised that they were not happy with me. I tried to find a part time job as a house cleaner and then I moved out.

I live in the dirtiest part of this city. I have no friends. I live with rats. Whether you believe it or not, I speak to these rats. I see them at night and early in the morning. They are my constant companions. Before I was afraid of them, but what can I do? The little money I have is barely enough for food. I cannot waste it on buying mouse traps and poisons, so I have developed a relationship with them. I have a bed and stove - that is all. No refrigerator, no washing machine, no radio, no TV. I have nothing to keep me company except the rats.

Q.: Before you came to Cyprus, what was your profession? Did you own your house?

I lived with my elder sister and I had my own part of the building. I am a painter. I had enough to take care of me and I had everything I needed, including a washing machine, dishwasher, oven, etc.

I was told that the welfare could help supply some of the basic things refugees needed. I did not ask for much. I just asked for a fridge and a gas cooker. It has been 6 months since I asked, but I have received nothing.

Q.: Do you have family somewhere that you can live with?

Yes, I have family in Canada. I am still waiting for the UNHCR to help me get the necessary travel documents. Life here is unbearable, at least for me.

Q.: (*Because I am always interested in matters of faith, I asked*)  
Do you pray?

Yes, I have not seen anyone in this country who practices my religion. (now that shocked me!) I am Ekankar. I am alone. The only person who I heard is Ekankar lives on the other side of Cyprus (meaning the TRNC – Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). So I have nobody to pray with.

Q.: Do you have a boyfriend?

I had one, but I did not like the way he treated me. He did not help me in anything, but always demands sex ... so I told him to leave me alone.

She is not only physically lonely, but also spiritually lonely. I wish I had a camera to take a snapshot of her face, to keep that smile she had when I told her I knew the Ekankar movement. I would have also taken a snapshot to show the disappointment on her face when I responded, "No I am not Ekankar".

I tried to help her. I got on the internet and found one of the Ekankar spiritual leaders. I explained this woman's need for fellowship.

She was loosing her mind. I could see that she was depressed and knew nothing about how to get herself treated for this depression.

The person who interviewed this lady during the Refugee Profiling exercise thought she was not mentally OK!

That is just one of the many problems faced by female refugees - depression.

This depression is not only caused by the complete change of environment, (in this case from good to bad), it is made worse when you look to some authority for help, they promise you, you hold on to them as the only source of hope, and then they fail you. She never got money from the Welfare Department. All she was getting was "come again next week".

Loneliness is not a physical state of being. It is not defined by 'not having people around'. It is a mental and emotional condition. A condition where one feels helplessly isolated. It is worse when the person feels unwanted, unloved, unaccepted. You may have people around you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week but if these people do not love you or appreciate your presence, then you are LONELY!

Anita is lonely. To some extent we may begin to think that she did not do enough to get herself adapted to the system and move on. Well, the system does not give enough room for adaptation, nor for moving on. Even Cypriot women and men, who have lived abroad for studies or some other reason, find it difficult to re-adapt. Two of them told me that they feel like foreigners after living and working here for 11 years! Therefore the problem is not that people in Anita's category have not worked hard enough to integrate and move on, the problem is that the society as a whole has very little social acceptance for these people.

Anita had tried many times to start painting again and to cooperate with local painters, but nobody would even give her a chance. Her talent is useless now. Closed. Xenophobic society - remember?

### **MIRABELLE**

Before I narrate her short story, I must first of all give her the thumbs up! Ask me for a brave woman, I will show you Mirabelle.

She is a well-educated, multilingual woman. But one of the languages she does not speak is Greek! How unfortunate.

After her first degree, she was a teacher back in her country. She was very active and productive in her society. One day she faced her push out factor. Just to let me know how active she was, she related this story:

"One day I came back from work and met a very attractive young man sitting with my dad. They spoke politics and football – topics I really enjoy, so I joined in the conversation while having my dinner. Then my cell phone rang. I picked up the call and found out I had to go to the prison because a certain woman was hurt. I volunteered as a social worker for female prisoners.

I went to the prison, got the situation sorted out and returned home. I continued eating my cold food. The gentleman was still sitting there talking with my dad. I did not join in because I did not know what they were talking about. I tried to take them back into politics, but the young man was headstrong. After about 10 minutes, my cell phone rang again. One of my students was in trouble. He had got into a fight with the neighbours. I took it upon myself to play mother for a boy 6 years younger than me!

I dropped my food, ran to Paul's place, got the situation sorted and came back home.

I could not continue eating because the food was so cold and tasteless. With all these comings and goings I had forgotten about my music practice, so again, my phone rang. I had to go to my music practice.

When I came back home, my dad told me that the young man left with regret. No matter how charming I looked, he could not marry a woman like me. A woman who was so active would not have time for her family.

Well I went to his house and told him I cannot marry a man like him who does not have the courage to stand and tell a woman how he feels.

That was Mirabelle before her PUSH OUT came. She found herself in a country where she could not even begin suspecting what the people were saying if they were speaking to her. From a 'superactive' woman, she became an inactive woman who found it even difficult to ask for what she needed. "This was traumatic." she said.

The once four-star Crown Hotel, which is now starless, is filled with people like Mirabelle: foreign to the country and its lifestyle. But unlike Mirabelle, they were physically violent and fearless. One morning she saw a man filing his knife. By the evening the man had accomplished his mission and slit open the throat of another.

Mirabelle with her good education has been pigeonholed to be a carpenter.

What I admire about Mirabelle is the courage she has within her and the way she perceives things. She is very objective and uncompromising. She knows that she could be more useful in the society because of her talents, but if that proves difficult, she does not sit and cry, she goes ahead and does her carpentry and volunteers for the things she enjoys.

"Life is not heaven for me in Cyprus, but I want to look at life more on the side of 'what can I do to make it better for me and the people in my situation? 'What is my contribution to this society?"

Mirabelle was unemployed for nine months. For those nine months she tried getting her file reopened at the Welfare Department. She received CY £150 after her first week in her new place of work. If you ask her how she survived the period, she has an answer she gives everyone ... "God promised that His children would never go without bread and water. I am His child. He provided"

"Faith in GOD is one of the things that makes me survive. I do not fold my hands and wait for manna to fall from heaven, but God blesses my every effort".

"I have something within me ... it is hope that things will be better someday".

## **LOOKING FOR EMPLOYMENT**

### **AJUA**

"After my bachelor's degree, I did a couple of other courses. Educated enough, I thought I should be able to get a nice job. I went to the Labour Office and was told that in a certain restaurant they needed someone who could use computers. Well I have worked a lot with those and what they needed was a cashier. I could handle that easily."

"Kalispera. (Good evening in Greek) I continued my conversation in English. "I got this document from the Labour Office and I need the job. So I am here to talk with you."

He took the paper from my hand and said, "The computer is not working right now. Could you come tomorrow night?"

"OK then. But what is wrong with it? May I take a look? If it is a software problem, I may give it a try."

"Oh no! It is the hardware. The computer got wet and I have already called my brother-in-law. He will come and get it".

"Goodnight then". And I turned my back to go. Knowing that he must be looking at me, I cat-walked and then turned back and caught his gaze!

The next day he was not there.

The following day, I gave him a call and explained to him that he needed to sign the document I gave to him, as I needed to take it back to the Labour Office. Well we caught up and he said to me, "I need someone who speaks Greek".

Automatically I changed the conversation into simple but perfect Greek. I called numbers and showed him that I spoke enough Greek to work there as a cashier.

He looked at me with pity in his eyes and smiled. I think it was difficult for him, but he said it all the same. "I cannot employ you because you are black." His expression was filled with pity.

I wonder what reaction he expected from me. But God has dealt completely with the violent and angry side of my character. I thank Him for that. In complete opposite to violence and anger, I gave him a smile and told him ... "I can change my skin colour and make my skin look like yours. But I will not do that because I am very proud of the one that I have. So please write on the piece of paper the reason you just told me, because the Labour Officer will want to see that."

He unfolded the paper and then wrote something on it. Signed it and gave it back to me. I looked at it, it was in Greek, but I read some Greek too. He said he preferred a Cypriot. I turned to him and said, "You lied. What if I show you a Cypriot identification document. What other lie would you tell?" I left him with a shocked look on his face.

There is provision in the law to take employers like this to court. But the problem is many people are not sensitised about their legal rights – I was also ignorant about this at the time.

The problem was that I was not a Cypriot woman. So even if a Bulgarian or a Russian with blond hair and blue eyes went there, he would turn them down for one simple reason ... they are migrants. The migrant woman always comes after the Cypriot woman has been considered. This happens even when the migrant woman is more qualified for the job. My terms of residence in Cyprus gives me ALL legal rights of employment as a Cypriot, but I wonder how far that may go because those papers did not change my origin or skin colour. I am still officially treated as a foreigner in terms of employment.

#### AUGUSTINA

"I cannot explain why she hates me. I do my work perfectly and try to be polite when I speak with her. She always has a rough tongue to me, calls me mavrou (black) in a very insulting way, especially when she gives me orders".

"She complains about my hairstyle all the time. She even complains about my lunch. Now those are personal things, but if she complains about them, that should tell you that she complains about my work. I give her no room to complain. Even the owner of the company loved me for that.

One day, she complained that I did not put the label straight.

"It is straight", said Yves. Yves is a French guy who works as a chemist.

"It is straight, yes, but not in the right position," said the woman.

"What do you mean? Straight means it is in the right position, and right way up." Yves said.

"I know, but I..." She did not complete the sentence.

The next few days the boss who loved me for being hardworking, always on time, never complaining and always smiling, called me in his office and fired me. He could not even look at my face when he

told me that I should stop working. I did not cry. I smiled and asked him to think about whether his decision was right. I was not going to come back even if he called me, but was it worth living with the guilt of firing a foreign woman just because a national disliked her hair and food and the way she walked? He keeps calling me to come back and work. I have decided I am not going."

There are a couple of trade unions that deal with problems of migrant employees. I have attended and closely participated in their conferences. Many problems are mentioned, general and sometimes particular. I hear what the migrants complain about. It is saddening and sorrowful to know that the trade unions are more politically minded and have hidden agendas for their objectives placed on paper. I tried tracing if a particular trade union would get a matter straightened out and I got disappointed with the reality.

A lady from Pakistan narrated this to me:

"When I told my boss that he was paying me less than we agreed, he said he'd changed his mind. A friend of mine told me to go to a certain trade union, get registered and then file a report. After filing my report the man I met told me that if I complained, I might lose the job. After all there are many other people ready to work for lower wages. But I signed a contract. I then went to KISA, and they helped me to get a release paper. I now have another job."

This is no publicity for KISA, it is a picture of the kind of people employed by the trade unions. Where is the protection of the migrant's right as an employee?

## EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT WIVES

It was difficult to find women who were willing to talk to me. Among those who did, several told me not to use their real names and others told me not to mention the cities. But they all accepted that their stories could be published. We can understand that. Security!

I went to four major cities and was only able to get 36 women to agree to talk. I cannot write out all their experiences because they have similar trends.

### 1st FINNISH WOMAN

She writes, "I met my former husband in America. We studied together and lived together very happily. We were married 12 years and had normal problems that were not serious. But it was difficult for me to get pregnant. He loved me all the same. When we migrated to Cyprus, my life changed. His mother became very much a part of our lives and things were just not the same. My suggestions for our little family had to go through consultations with his mother before he said 'yes' or 'no' to anything.

Then the problem I always feared came up; my not being able to conceive. I visited medical doctors and specialists who all told me to bring my husband along. He never came with me. This was not a major problem for his mother. My husband had it in his mind that I must be the problem. They refused to think that there could be even the slightest possibility that he had problems too!

What makes me very sad is that on the day he decided to file for divorce, he did not say "I think it will be better for us" he said "My mother thinks it will be good for us to divorce since you cannot have children".

What happened to my husband? His brain had suddenly changed to his mother thinking for him and taking decisions for him. I asked him

if that was what he wanted and all he could say was ... "what else can I do?"

"I advise women who want to marry Cypriot men" she says, "the marriage vow is not 'till death do us part'. For most of them, the vow they give to the foreign woman is 'till I want no more of you' or 'till my mother gets angry with you'.

What makes me really happy now is that not being able to conceive was not my problem, it was his, because I am now six months pregnant.

I wonder why I had to go through all the stress, trying to make him happy. To compensate for the fact that I could not give him children, I went the extra mile to see that he was not sad. I never complained when I knew he was cheating. I lost my own mind".

I asked this lady whether or not her mother in law was the ONLY problem.

"No, his sisters were a bone in my neck. They would laugh at me and treat me with spite. They never used to let me go out with them. I tried to find other Finnish women and I did. Many of them have the same problems, so we consoled each other and became friends.

Her present husband is not Cypriot and they are happily awaiting the birth of a baby boy.

#### 2ND FINNISH WOMAN

"When we got to the other side of the road the man who came out of the car was wearing a police uniform. He did not even talk to my husband, he came straight to me and hit me in my stomach."

This lady has a weight problem ... she is obese. She did not mention what caused her divorce from her previous husband. On this fateful day she was crossing the road with her husband and a car was driving towards them. She could not be faster than she was, taking into

consideration her weight. But she struggled on and got across. And what happened? The policeman came out of his car and hit her in the stomach. He was furious with them as he was on an important mission and they were crossing the road lazily. She spoke some Greek, so she tried to beg the man not to hit her again. He did not, but he arrested both of them, forgot about the important mission, and took them to the police station. What was their charge? "OFFENDING A POLICE OFFICER". At the police station, she started bleeding profusely.

"Oh, I had wanted to surprise my husband with this pregnancy and now I am going to lose it. God please help me." she prayed.

Her husband is Egyptian and at the police station, he was asked, "Why are you Muslims terrorists? You will go back to your country!" Due to the woman's state, she was taken to the hospital and her husband was kept in custody for three days.

She did not lose the baby and it was still a surprise to her husband that they were going to have a child. The surprise was mixed with fear and anger.

After he was released the lady filed a complaint to the Finnish Embassy. The case is turning around now. The police officer that was offended is now the offender. "He calls us every night to beg. I wish I could do something for him, but it is too late. He has to face the consequences of his actions.

His wife now says I am the wicked person. She thinks that I did not have to report the incident to the Finnish Embassy. I should have reported it to the police boss.

Any person who believes in the fair treatment of women and justice to all, surely would like the way this story ends. I am not going to analyse this story, but just think with me for a minute ... a police officer striking a woman! Not the man.

### **BRITISH WOMAN**

I was greatly in need of a job. I had walked all day with a Filipino trying to find one. Then we met Costas. He was sitting in front of his shop. He gave us a smile. I gave one in return. We walked towards him and he was very welcoming.

He had white teeth and a dark moustache. His eyes were gorgeous! His spoken English was good and with an Australian accent. I was impressed!

Anyway, we told him I needed a job. Immediately he called his home and talked with someone who, I rightly guessed, was his wife. And I went to meet her.

My job was to baby sit little twin girls. I learnt to love the children. There was no way I could resist these two. They were lovely kids who fought most of the time but also knew how to play together immediately after the fight was over. When they were not fighting or playing, they were sleeping. I had to beg them to eat their dinner. Sometimes I danced for them. One day I overheard them saying that they were going to tell me that if I do not sing and dance, they would not eat. So immediately their dinner was ready, I started singing and dancing. The singing attracted them and they saw me dancing. Then I told them, if they do not eat, I will stop! Great plan. They ate!

Their mum was a nurse by profession and she worked with other nurses at the general hospital caring for cancer patients. She always had to come home before I left. For a certain period of time, around two weeks, she came back very sad every day. She would talk to me and then call her husband. Her husband always told her that she did not need to work, as it was so stressful.

It was not just the stress of work; it was the attitude of her co-workers.

These two weeks were a period of hell for her. The lady she was working with did most of her work sitting down. She would order this

British lady to do every single thing. "Get the pan, put some water. Put it on the table, get the towel, put it there. Go get the syringe."

When she spoke to me, she would always end the story with "For heaven's sake I am not a nurse aid". She tried talking with her colleague. Guess what! She fell like rain. Talking in English and mixing it up with Greek, she pushed the British lady on her chest, showed her the finger and then went and reported the British woman to the Administrator for 'refusing to help'!

I can feel her frustration. This did not just happen once. Different 'shades' of this experience happen to different women every day. But to this woman, it was a particular colleague who was 'on her case' all the time. I was surprised when one day she came back home very happy.

"Have shifts changed"? I teased her.

"No", she responded.

"So what is the smile about? Did your colleague have a fall on the stairs and break her wrist and you had to help her?"

"No Beryl. I wish worse for her, but I am happy because I resigned".

Wao! Some people just cannot comprehend it, can they? Her husband loved and adored her so much and yet she couldn't put up with the hell she received when at work.

She could not speak the local language, but understood a little. Sometimes she understood when the other workers were talking about her. She just wondered why.

I asked her if she was not the problem. Maybe she perceived their jokes and gossip as directed at her when they weren't.

"I could not have been misperceiving for three years" was the response.

What a story. I made a mistake when I said some people just couldn't take it. She took it for three years. Bravo!

From my short stay with her, I saw a national who loved his migrant wife, and would not let his mother interfere.

"She is my wife as you are my father's wife, and I have decided that you MUST respect that, or never visit us." He said this to his mother who complained that it was the fault of her daughter in-law that her grandchildren do not speak Greek. She would prefer a woman who spoke the local language. He was man enough to stand by her.

### **MARION**

"He just took his clothes and left". For four years now, I am here with three kids and it is hard, but I am making it."

Her husband is one of those who was an economic migrant in Nigeria. That is where they met. He was a prosperous businessman. He owned and ran a top rank restaurant and made a lot of money. We got married and had all our kids in my country. It was a wonderful life. He was a wonderful father to them. Life was so sweet. We built our house so we were not paying rent. We were both working and so we had a house-help to take care of the kids. Things were just beautiful. We communicated well and made decisions easily. We had some disagreements but nothing serious.

One summer he decided we take a trip to Cyprus and visit his mother. When we arrived, the welcome was warm. All I could see was the love and connection between mother and son, I really liked it. Well it was a vacation, so we decided to live in the available space ... the flat above his mother's flat.

We had dinners together in her mother's dining room and I communicated as best as I could, even trying to learn a few words of Greek.

The children got acquainted with their aunts, nieces, nephews and grandmother. They picked up the language very easily.

Well the vacation was over and the children had to go back to school.

Guess his response ... "We may not go back. Mum does not want me to go back. She thinks that I should live here".

"That is what she thinks. What do you think? And besides, she wants you to live here. What about the kids and me? She does not want us? Just you?"

"OK, we will go back".

I realised that he had dodged the answer to my question. I knew that something was going on.

Time went by and he registered the children in a village school, without my knowledge, and we quarrelled about it and I was just not OK! I tried to talk with his mother and she told me that her son and grandchildren are staying. If I want to go, it is fine with her.

I started seeing my husband very rarely. I asked him what was going on and he said he feels bored staying home.

"Get a job then, if you want to stay here because I am going."

Oopse! We had overstayed, and my passport had expired. I could not travel.

Things progressively went wrong. No more communication with my husband. Everything I asked him had to be discussed over dinner. He had changed me from a woman who earned a salary to a woman who served coffee when his friends came around.

I planned my own strategy. I decided not to ask him for money. I went out and got a job. I still have this job today and I am very thankful to God for it. He was very furious about my getting a job. He became very insecure and would trace my every step.

One day when he went out, I took the kids to the home of one of his sister's. I told her we were not going back to the village. I was not being cruel. I was just trying to run away from a place that had become like a prison to me, with no one to converse with and a husband, the only one who can understand you, hardly being there. Before I got the job, he would not allow me to go out. He even went to buy me tampons. So getting employment meant leaving the house every day and coming home only when I finish a day's work. He told me to quit the job because we would go 'home' at the end of the academic year!

"Great. I will quit when we are ready to go" I told him.

This sister of his was very understanding. She could see my pain, but could do nothing because she did not want to interfere with my family matters. I wish his mother was the same.

In my mind I knew that our relationship had gone sour because of his mum. But how was I to prove this to him? After a few days, I got a place of my own and took the kids along with me. He was not home to see that I was moving. After settling down, I called my husband and told him. "Darling, we are living here and you are very welcome to live with us. I cannot continue living with your mother and having my family problems discussed over dinner. Staying away from her will make us live in peace. Living together will cause a lot of friction". I tried to explain as much as I could.

I was not surprised when he came. I knew my husband loved his kids and me. I was happy once again. I kept on working and he stayed home. The kids went to school. I dropped them off and picked them up every morning. I was waiting for the end of the academic year. The academic year ended and he did not mention anything about leaving. Instead he bought a house without me knowing.

I was scandalised when I found out. In order to remain sane I decided to adjust my mind to the fact that I would live semi-permanently in Cyprus. When I asked him what happened to our house in my country,

he coldly told me he had sold it, but the restaurant was still running. "We will buy another house when we go back", he concluded.

This was ridiculous. This was not happening to me. I told myself "Woman, you have to be strong for your family's happiness. No fighting in front of the kids (my mum taught me). Remember the power of silence." So I decided to show my anger towards him by being quiet and extraordinarily humble, which he thought was strange. He could barely understand why I was not screaming and talking out venom on him.

"Why don't you want to talk to me?"

"Speak to me or I will do something."

Then one day I told him "I am not talking to you because you did not think it was right to 'talk to me' when you sold our house. You did not 'talk to me' when you planned to live here permanently. You did not 'talk to me' when you got the children registered in a village school. You talked to your mother. She is your mother, I respect that, but I am the mother of your kids, I take the decisions for their lives. Not their grandmother."

Now he realised what was going on in my mind. During the year, he never thought I would be angry about these things. I started wondering where his mind had been. He became so insensitive. Did I really have to point it out to him that he and his mother made decisions for my life and the lives of my kids?

"OK" he said, "let's go back to Nigeria."

"Are you teasing me?" I asked. "That is not the question here. In the middle of the second school year, you suddenly want to go back. What happened to the end of the last school year? Think about your children. Where are we going to live? In the restaurant? Have you asked yourself these questions? Get those questions answered and you will see that this is not the best time to leave."

He was quiet. I saw tears flow down his cheeks. This was something I had never seen since we got married. Shocked, I reached to him and hugged him. I told him things would be OK. We just needed time. We needed to wait for the kids to complete their academic year and we needed to apply for citizenship for me to get a passport. These things take time.

"It has been very difficult for me to adapt to this country. Everything looks strange to me. I cannot make a plans for my life. I cannot live here anymore", he announced.

This sounded very funny. I laughed. We went to sleep. When he woke up the next morning, he simply just packed his clothes and left. I did not make a scene about it. Again, I reminded myself to be strong for the kid's sake. I am still strong for their sake.

My mother-in-law has not made things easier for me. She accuses me of not being a good wife and that I made her son go back to my 'stupid country'. She calls and speaks to the kids and I can hear her make promises, raise up the hopes of the kids with Christmas gifts and sweets, which are never fulfilled. They end up crying.

I fell really ill and could not even walk, the kids called her and told her that I could not even stand to cook for them, and they were hungry ... she made another false promise even in that condition, so I stopped her from communicating with my kids.

I do not know what I hope for, but I am strong and fine.

Taking another look at this story, I see a woman whose marriage has been shattered because her mother-in-law was allowed to interfere. She thinks there is something she can do about it, but does not really know what she hopes for! There are many women in the same situation, who have fought to keep their marriages intact, but the bond of mother and son was stronger than that of husband and wife. In fact it should be the reverse, not even equal.

### OBSERVATIONS ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANT WIVES AND SUGGESTIONS

I advised Marion to apply to the Welfare. With three kids and low salary the Welfare should be able to offer some assistance or give some advice on which office could help her. She tried to no avail. There is provision in the law for such families to have financial assistance. The criteria, however, are very blurred. A certain divorced, foreign mother with three children below the age of ten receives this assistance and another separated mother with three children below the ages of ten does not, and nobody explained why she could not get the assistance. It is one of those cases where things work for the person who knows somebody.

When someone applies for assistance from the Welfare Department and does not get it, this applicant deserves an explanation. In most cases, the applicant goes away thinking that the workers are just prejudiced against people of her kind. Well, nobody gave any explanations.

Once, instead of explaining to Catherina (a refugee woman) that her file was still with the supervisor so she could not be attended to, the social worker told her to go back to her country. As cruel as it sounds, it is true. This one voice just echoes at least five more.

Some of the social workers love their jobs and do it right. Unfortunately, these are very few, and they are sometimes warned not to 'help' too much. On the other hand, we have those who make you feel sick just by the look on their face when you go into their offices.

The women in this category are unhappy and most of the time depressed and physically tired. I would have suggested that getting socially active - interacting with more people could do some good. However, it may be difficult for a single mother with children to get socially active in a capitalist society like this one. The society has turned these women into women without social lives. They work for very long hours to 'make ends meet' and have little or no time for socialisation, hence integration in the real sense is impossible.

### Women married to cypriot men

What can I say? Nothing! But after reading this book, I would not like to bring my husband back to Cyprus without us re-defining the terms of our marriage. In fact we will visit, but not reside permanently.

I know that there are cases which have been successful. However there is a common characteristic with the successful mixed marriages – when the mother-in-law (the mother of the Cypriot man) is absent either by death, or lives abroad.

There was one extraordinary case though! A certain lady I interviewed had been married to her husband for twenty two years: She faced the same problems with her mother-in-law, but she worked really hard to keep her husband from the criticisms of his mother. She did this by making her husband accept that the role of a mother are also taken up by the wife when a marriage vow is taken equally as the husband took the role of her father. He had to love his mother and visit, but not in her absence. And if anything was said that she did not understand, it was his task to explain it until I learnt enough of the Greek language. I also made his mother understand that and accept the fact that if she tried anything to destroy our marriage, she would never be able to talk to her son again. This was a tough thing to tell a mother, but necessary to keep our marriage.

This strategy worked for her. But it did not work for another. Geraldine's husband actually sent her back to her home because he says, "my mother did not like her".

I told him that the problem was not his mother, the problem was that he was not man enough to protect his wife.

I am not married, but I think that a woman's role in marriage changes with the changing times. We have passed the age when women had to be behind or beside the husband. I am not saying the wife should go ahead of the man, (although they should if necessary). In whatever position a wife is, she should give her husband a STRONG PUSH OR PULL in the right direction.

Communication works miracles in cases like this.

### Suggestions about refugee women

The suggestion to refugee women is this: Immediately you become recognised as a refugee, get a copy of any material which talks about the rights and responsibilities of a refugee and study it. It is the right of the refugee to know the things you should do, should not do, and the things that should be done for you. Since the state has no provisions for such orientation, I urge you to do it by approaching the few NGO's around. They will get you informed. There is a list of NGO's at the back of this book that help with women's problems, with some specialising in foreign women and their integration.



## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### **INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

After having in-depth interviews with all possible categories of migrant women, it is necessary to suggest different methods of managing conflicts. I learned, during a training seminar on Gender and Conflict Management that was organised by the Human Rights Education Network in Cyprus, some techniques which I want to pass on. However it is left with the individual if she would want to use any, and which one she would choose to use, and in what situation.

These suggestions may be used in both active (physical violence involved) and passive (no physical violence involved) conflicts.

#### **ATTACKING BACK**

This is when the victim gives back to the abuser what he/she thinks the abuser deserves. In other words it is revenge. In most cases the revenge is heavier than the first 'blow'.

The expected results are either positive, namely – satisfaction, equality, may also stop the continuation of the abuse (if the return blow is heavier than the first blow), one may also destroy the abuser. OR the negative results may be that this may prolong the conflict if the abuser fights back and destroys relationships.

#### **SURRENDER**

In this situation the victim accepts defeat and does nothing to stop the abuser. Expected positive results are: stop of conflict, the victim survives and may be pitied by the abuser. On the other hand, the

abuser may be ruthless and destroy you even more. Then you feel humiliated. Repeated surrender affects self-esteem and could make the abuser feel heroic. The surrender technique could also encourage repeated abuse.

### LEAVING

Deciding to leave the conflict environment, or ignoring the abuser may result in gain of self-control, temporal respect and time enough to assess the situation, and physical harm is avoided. The negative side of leaving and taking time to assess the situation is that the story will lose its credibility and you may never find a solution.

### GOING TO JUSTICE

Getting the abuser charged with a crime. Expected results: The advantages are you get justice. Pay back time for the abuser. Dignity and self respect is gained. The abuser is exposed and you gain community support. A good example is set for abusers and the abused. However, this is expensive and you get opposition from the abuser's friends. In cases of trafficked women which is usually organised crime, the abuser normally has a friend in the justice system and in most cases it is the bosses. So they do all they can to frustrate the efforts of the abused person to seek justice.

Before making a choice from the above suggestions, there is one very important thing we must do - analyse the conflict.

- a) What do we like about the conflict. Will peace or enmity be the result? What do we want?
- b) What do we not like about the conflict?
- c) What are the causes of the conflict?
- d) What situations surround the causes? Can we change those situations or not?

- e) Try to understand various aspects of the other person's points of view.
- f) Try to listen with the mind and not just hear.
- g) Empathise with the person and see how you would react.

After analysing the conflict situation, it is easier to decide which one to choose.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

You will never stop being foreign unless you go back to your country. In other words, you are not foreign only when you are amongst your kind. For the female migrant who is white, it may be different, but being coloured, one feels so foreign even as you walk the streets and the way you get looked at in the supermarket.

We may not be able to change our phenotype, but we can successfully change our attitude and our perception of things around us. Deciding to be positive in every situation is the first step to overcome any obstacles.

"If you want to be loved, you've got to love" Ghandi. This principle goes hand in hand with the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth who said, "Do to others as you want them to do to you." This means that we can only make the nationals of the countries we live in accept, love and respect us only if we teach them to do so, by doing the same. This works in every aspect of life. There is no way someone who has received kindness continuously from someone else will still remain mean.

The first thing to do in any foreign land is to learn the language. With that, you can communicate well with the people. They may appreciate you better.

Be wise. It is better to say nothing than to say an unwise thing. One Sunday afternoon in a hairdressing salon, an old woman of about 65 years of age walked in and said a very warm hello to all. We were five in number, all from different parts of Africa. As usual, she started asking questions. She dwelt more on one lady married to a Cypriot man. And this lady said "You caught a big fish", referring to my friend's husband. All the women started laughing. Well I did not. I told her that it was the man who caught the 'big fish'.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Well it was him who lived in Cyprus for so long and did not see a fish big enough for him, so he travelled to Africa and found my friend. It was not my friend who came looking for fish. Secondly, even in that part of Africa where he found my friend, married her and had three kids, there are thousands of Cypriot women" I concluded.

"You are one tough cookie," she said.

I smiled, and asked her if she needed anything to drink.

She got my point.

This is what I mean by being wise. Make any person, who thinks you are low, to understand that there are many qualities in you that are lacking in some people they consider 'high'.

She made it clear to us that she would never allow her son to get married to a foreigner. Be they black or white. Get her reason ...

"I am not racist. If I were, I would not come here. But marrying a foreigner would cause a lot of problems. They are not Orthodox." She is just afraid to accept something foreign - Xenophobic.

Keep yourself up there. I am sure the anecdote explains all.

In whatever situation you find yourself, try to learn as many things as you can. At work, learn everything. Even the things not assigned to you. You know, it is not their fault that you find yourself in a foreign country. It is not your fault either. In any case, you have to work ten times harder than you worked in your country to meet up to their standards. It is your responsibility. It is no exaggeration! You will never be served with everything you need. We all need to be respected and treated in a better way. We need to be accepted as people, just from another place. These things are to be earned. You must strive to get them.

My dad told me, "Do not complain, do not explain". He said this, but always added, "Your decisions and actions must be made and taken after thorough consideration." It is hard not to complain. If one can try not to complain but just do what is right, there will be no need for explanations.

Be polite at all times. Even when you feel you have been downtrodden, say the truth but say it sternly and to the point. The truth hurts sometimes, but tell it especially when it has to do with how you feel about a situation.

We need to meet other people for fellowship and support, so never forsake the congregation of people who share your identity. Solidarity is necessary in foreign lands.

If I had to write everything I had in my computer into this book, it would have made a giant volume. I just selected those that I thought could accomplish the purpose of this publication ... to inform and educate the female migrant, who is in a tough place away from home, to remind her that it is a tough place out there ... efforts need to be multiplied by ten to survive.

Get actively involved in any activity of the community (if there is any). If there is none, start up your own. You have the strength to make it happen. Look inside you and you will know that somehow YOU CAN MAKE IT.



## MEET THE AUTHOR

Beryl - Adolph Nalowa Esembe is a young woman residing in the Island of Cyprus for the moment. Born in 1972, she hails from the South West Province in the Republic of Cameroon.

Her interest in minority groups explains why she has been a volunteer for many International Non-governmental organisations.

She holds two Bachelors degrees – one in Religion and the other in Biology – from Andrews University Berrien Springs, Michigan and is rounding up her Masters Degree in Applied Sociology from the Intercollege in Cyprus, with an interest in Gender and Migration. She also has a certificate of training in Gender and Conflict Management from European Network of Women. She is looking forward to do a PhD in the field of Gender and Migration.

Her love for humanity and compassion for the suffering, coupled with her education and research, place her at a point fit enough to write about Migrant Women.

*Valerie Fidelia  
Nicosia, Cyprus*